

The Times, Life and Moral Dilemma of Beria

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By

Andrew Sangster

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-2805-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2805-5

I dedicate this book to my wife Carol
and our family of Richard, Pandora, Robert, Jessi,
and our grandson Joshua who is enthusiastic about history

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to my wife Carol for proof-reading this text and offering sound advice on ensuring that the most complex situations are readable. I am also indebted to The Revd. Canon Dr Peter Doll, Canon Residentiary and Librarian at Norwich Cathedral for his observations on the difficulty of dealing with the moral issues raised in Parts Three and Four. I am equally grateful for the guidance of Dr Richard Maguire lecturer at the UEA University.

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS USED IN TEXT

GDR	German Democratic Republic
GKO	State Defence Committee
GPU	State Political Directorate
GUGB	Chief Directorate for State Security
INO	Foreign Intelligence Service
JAC	Jewish Antifascist Committee
KGB	Committee for State Security
KI	Committee of Information (foreign directories of MGB and GRU)
MGB	Ministry of State Security
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKGB	People's Commissariat of State Security
NKID	People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.
OGPU	(Joint State Political Directorate) Soviet Intelligence and Security Service.
OO	(Osoby Otdel) part of NKVD
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SED	Socialist Unity Party
SMERSH	(Death to Spies) Counterintelligence.

PREFACE

My interest in history began as a small boy with the Christmas gift of a book called *Our Island Story*. This book caught my childhood attention because of some of the gruesome pictures of beheadings and battle scenes. As my reading progressed my history books covered events in a chronological order relating the major incidents of the past, with limited comments such as stating that “he was a tyrant” or this was a “terrible and barbarous action.” My junior history reading continued in this style, but I noted that some historians occasionally stepped out of the custom of relating events to make wider comments on how a situation arose. History writing has come a long way since, but my attention was captivated by a throw-away comment by Solzhenitsyn when he wrote “*this belongs to the history of morals, which is where everything else originates as well.*”¹

In trying to understand the events and characters of the past we often neglect to account for human conduct. Some would argue that is not the point of history. However, it is a simple question at one level, but a complex puzzle once started. Describing the circumstances of the day or of a situation carries us only so far but trying to probe the minds of men is difficult, if not a seemingly impossible task. Human conduct can sometimes be explained by an adherence to an ideology which can involve forms of nationalism, ethnic bigotry, religious belief systems and a myriad of other factors, good and bad. It is possible to understand individual intentions because of the acts done by that person as related by history, but understanding the motives is another and more complex situation. In many ways it comes down to trying to understand the nature of humans and what propels them in their decision making. In his analysis of what drove ordinary German policemen to kill Jewish men, women, children and babies, Christopher Browning wrote “the behaviour of any human being is, of course, a very complex phenomenon, and the historian who attempts to ‘explain’ it is indulging in a certain arrogance.”² This book does not pretend to offer an explanation, but to indicate possible pointers for serious consideration.

As one of life’s perpetual students, I have had a lifelong interest in history, but have also acquired degrees in law, theology and moral

¹ Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.131

philosophy, which stimulated me to try and utilise this knowledge in this history and biographical account of a notorious historical figure from the Soviet past. I chose the infamous Soviet politician and policeman Beria, because I have travelled widely in the old Communist Eastern Bloc as a government guest and as a curious visitor, and I grew to like the Russian people very much, but always remained bemused by their political system and its ramifications. In 1970 I asked about the Katyń massacres and was hurried out of the room, and when I inquired about Beria, I gained the impression a few had heard of him, but they pretended otherwise.

This biography of Beria is basically a history, but following Solzhenitsyn's comments I have tried to ask further questions behind the historical backdrop, and looked beyond Beria's *intentions* towards his *motives*, and what made him the man he became.³ A person so appalling that in the 1950s there was a Communist attempt to expunge his name from their history. Such an exercise also demands a wider horizon than one man and one country to provide even the merest indicators to explain such gross iniquity, an immorality on such a scale that it can only be designated as evil. Beria is the subject, but he reflects many others in history and currently. As such the book's final parts are devoted to the argument that we have free will, but under certain conditions it can be restricted if not suppressed. The biographical details of Beria explain his deeds and intentions; the final part on the question of free will examine his motives and responsibility.

² Browning Christopher, *Ordinary Men* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) p.188

³ Solzhenitsyn was arrested in February 1944 by SMERSH and sent to the Gulag camps. He was rehabilitated in 1957 during Khrushchev's leadership.

BOOK OUTLINE

Part One will outline Russia's background and Soviet history during Beria's life. This is not so much in defence of Beria, but to understand the degree to which he was a man of his times, and to set him in the context of his historical background. The history of Russia and the Soviet Union needs volumes upon volumes, but this part is rigorously condensed to illustrate the overall development and nature of those days, and Beria is only occasionally mentioned in this survey to indicate his whereabouts and position during this time-slot of 1900-1953.

Part Two will look at Beria's life and the views of many historians who have written about him or made passing observations. His personal life is somewhat obscure, but what is known with some certainty will be explored, and his political machinations studied since they reveal more about the nature of this man. His actions and intentions will be outlined as well as seeking his motives.

Part Three of this study will peruse the vexed question as to whether someone like Beria was a mere product of his age, and how far an individual can be held morally responsible for his actions. The disciplines of psychology, criminology, jurisprudence, biology, bio-chemistry, theology, philosophy, environment, up-bringing and historical background will be surveyed to examine whether they can offer any form of acceptable explanation in understanding the nature of an immorality, which descends to evil. A new book by Professor Plomin (October 2018) based on the study of our genes has suggested that our inherited make-up is highly persuasive in terms of our conduct. His book is reflected on with the current writer's personal communications with Professor Plomin.¹ Part Three presents the view that humans can retain their free will, although it is sometimes constrained by automatic reflexive responses.

Part Four will illustrate that sometimes free will can be suppressed under certain circumstances, and it will address some of the issues raised about personal moral responsibility. The question of the repression of the free will relates to areas such as putative duress (coercion), cowardice, breaking ranks, a tyrannical dictator's control, ideology, obeying orders,

¹ Plomin Robert, *Blueprint: How DNA Makes Us Who We Are* (London: Penguin, 2018)

historical background and other factors. This part also explores the warnings of Harari's latest publication, where possible future restraints on free will, (as far as it exists according to Harari) are outlined, with the serious ramifications that humanity is in danger of becoming degraded.² This final part will study not just Beria, but it will provide various scholars' insights into the cause of evil under the circumstances of war and repression, and to try and understand how under certain conditions, humanity's use of free will can be repressed and used to create evil.

² Harari Yuval Noah, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018)

PART ONE

**RUSSIAN HISTORY DURING
BERIA'S LIFETIME**

Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. (Churchill)
Stalin remains the central mystery within the Soviet enigma.¹

INTRODUCTION

Three years before he died Sudoplatov “an illegal” (agent, an assassin, and later senior officer of the Soviet secret services) who was deeply involved with Soviet intrigue, stealing atomic secrets from abroad, organising the death of Trotsky, and was close to Beria quoted Russia’s chief archivist Rudolf Pikoya in 1993: “Russian historians do not know postwar history. Even specialists in this period did not know much.”² Russian historians have often had to be selective as to what they wrote, the archives have considerable evidence missing, and some of what they do have may be somewhat dubious in terms of integrity. Even some of the best Soviet historians, both Soviet and otherwise, clash over details and incidents. When Wittlin wrote his biography of Beria it became immediately apparent that it contained a strong fictional aspect as he described what Beria was thinking as a schoolboy, and he relied on “tales” and generalised myths.³ He probably took this route because of the lack of substantive material. Alliluyeva Svetlana, Stalin’s daughter is occasionally referred to but with the caution as she had her own hidden agendas.

Solzhenitsyn was an interesting source if only because he was there and experienced the suppression of freedom, as was Sudoplatov who helped create that sense of State control. Sudoplatov’s memoirs appear to be truthful to a degree which is unusual in the traditional self-serving memoirs. This is because of his admissions in committing totally immoral acts of murder, and in the merciless elimination of potential enemies. His main purpose was to rehabilitate his reputation as a reliable and faithful Communist, and in doing this he revealed some interesting insights into Soviet history and the man Beria. The British spy and diplomat Bruce Lockhart lived in Russia during the early revolutionary days, and provided some interesting insights in the revolutionary period, especially when he was arrested on suspicion of trying to assassinate Lenin. If Russia is a *riddle wrapped in a mystery* this remains even more true with its recent Soviet history than with its distant past.

The “history of the Soviet Union has often been interpreted as a great tragedy; a cruel deviation of a country from the general trajectory of human history,” and has been used to demonstrate that state power can sometimes lead to slavery.⁴ The problem with writing history is a tendency to write it backwards. It is impossible to write about Hitler and the rise of his party

without the ever-consuming knowledge of the consequences in 1945. The same issue arises when writing about Lenin and Stalin because there is always the shadow of the purges, the Gulag, and it is especially difficult when writing from the western capitalistic world, which at times feels like another planet. Stalin who dominated this period will always be regarded as the archetypal example of the totalitarian regime. The historiography of Russian history is confusing, sometimes caused by the variety of political angles adopted by western historians, who are often trying to find a new interpretation. It is frequently the case that the various opinions are influenced between conscious and sub-conscious ideological viewpoints.

The overthrow of the Tsar has been given many interpretations from ideological grounds to the power of emerging personalities. However, the main cause of the revolution started in Petrograd with “the largely spontaneous action of thousands of hungry, angry, and war-weary women and men who had lost all confidence in the government of Nicholas II.”⁵ This was the power-house of the start of revolution and many interpretations have been applied; they range from the Bolsheviks organising the outburst, to utilising the moment, to grasping power, to being asked to accept power. The soldiers and workers had established their councils or soviets and they needed support and direction. They had overthrown the old order and now needed a leadership to govern, and consequently in October 1917 “the Bolsheviks came to power in the name of the soviets.”⁶

This study is not about the intricacies of historiography but notes them in passing, because this is an exploration of the man Beria. It is critical to understand what influenced him, and to look briefly at the landscape of Soviet history, if only to place Beria in his natural background. His name is occasionally mentioned in Part One simply to know what he was doing as major events unfolded. This historical background analysis is sweeping and necessarily short because its sole intention is to paint the backdrop of Beria’s stage, and to understand the essence of the man. Men such as Stalin, Lenin, Kerensky, and Trotsky are generally well-known; other figures appear in the short history with whom the reader may be less familiar, so they have been given brief footnotes to explain who they were in the unfolding drama. As a curious note before the history unfolds, in Part One alone, of the major actors on Stalin’s stage 40% died in the purges, 20% assisted him, 5% were assassinated, 10% died from illness and only 25% died from old age: this was a risky and dangerous time and place in which to live. The very brief biographical footnotes are also contained in Appendix One in case the reader needs to jolt the memory.

Importance of Historic Background

It could be argued that some people have greater free will than others, but there can be little doubt in human experience that the family, and especially the national circumstances of the day into which we are born by fate, helps formulate our personality and the way we respond. By the time human beings become conscious of their self-identity they are already being shaped by their environment, by people of influence, other factors, and the events of the day. The surroundings in which people live is a powerful element, as must be the general nature of the society in which they are nurtured.

Some countries are more at peace than others, and there are places where violence with its brutalisation and the need for survival becomes paramount. In the need or demand for change traditional values can be challenged, emergent leaders can be overly powerful, and Marx was probably correct in claiming that economics and “lack of fairness” can sow the seeds of protest. Unfair economic factors, a sense of injustice and a powerful or charismatic leader who demands change may be good or bad, but the consequences have often proved violent. This is frequently witnessed at a tribal level, but the consequences on the modern international scenario of a breakdown in any constituent society and the consequential strife is much more far-reaching.

In the twentieth century because of the Great War of 1914-18 many hitherto long-established European countries lost not only their monarchies, but a sense of stability, and were plunged into either civil war or turmoil. Germany’s Weimar Republic disintegrated in the face of Nazi fascism, mainly brought about by economic misery and the failings of the Versailles Treaty. In Italy Mussolini’s rise was a combination of the Italian failure to achieve any substantial gains from the Great War (the so-called *Mutilated Victory*) and the accompanying serious economic problems. In Spain which had remained neutral in the Great War there was instability because Spain had remained feudalistic, and resulted in two dictatorships, Primo de Rivera and later Franco who lasted until 1975. In the liberal democracies France had so many governments it was described as “musical chairs,” and even in the more stable Britain the problems of poverty and unfair distribution of wealth led to general strikes. In the powerful USA there was considerable economic and social distress during this period.

Economic instability, the uneven distribution of wealth, and the general injustice of any society will eventually lead to a challenge of the status quo. Russia was the first major nation in the twentieth century to defy its traditional ruling system. Such was the size of the Russian Empire and the simmering problems in Europe that the end results were enduring. At times

Russian history was conspicuous for its serious violence, severe repression, and the ramifications are still ongoing with international mutual suspicion to this day. Russia changed from a traditional monarchy to a form of bureaucratic Communism in the briefest of times, and an overview of this period is needed “to understand the mechanism of the power struggle” and to understand what happened.⁷ On looking back, it gives the appearance of decades of trauma, and this was the major background with its influential elements bearing on the man Lavrenty Beria.

CHAPTER ONE

To 1914



Tsar Nicolas II

Historians often ask the question as to whether the Tsarist regime could have survived; it was not just Russia that was facing problems, but the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were fighting pressures they were ill-equipped to control. In the old Russian Empire, the border countries were all struggling with a sense of independence from a range of nationalities (especially the Slavs), the destabilising effect of not coping with economic modernisation, and therefore economic discontent, and the Romanov family was undoubtedly the weakest of all the European royal houses.

Nearly all histories of Russian rule in the years before Bolshevism will show without doubt that the Romanov family led a society which created a deep impoverishment for the majority, while a very small minority controlled all the wealth and influence. This is a consistent problem in human history, but it was especially severe in Russia and its territories. The sense of economic deprivation and social injustice which existed in many countries at the turn of the nineteenth century was, in Russia, reaching an early crisis point because of the extreme nature of the self-evident injustice within their social structure. As one historian noted: "It is clear that revolutions do not usually break out unless there is a situation so bad as to invite revolution."⁸ When the British diplomat Bruce Lockhart arrived in Russia before the Great War his opening pages indicated he was struck by the wealth of the few, and given that it was the same in Britain and other European countries, it must have been a starker picture for this dichotomy to be noticed.⁹

The Romanovs had ruled Russia since 1613, and when Beria was born in 1899 Tsar Nicholas II was the last of this royal line. Nicholas II was not a natural leader and was despised more than Kaiser Wilhelm II and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary. He was noted above all for his repression of any form of political party, especially the developing Trade Unions. His secret police known as the Okhrana and his military formed a powerful and brutal defence against anyone who challenged his authority, which included the growing industrial strikes by impoverished and underpaid workers.

As with his forebears Nicholas II had a massive Empire to govern covering not less than a sixth of the planet's ground surface. Britain's empire was larger, but it was overseas, and as with previous Tsars, Nicholas II was constantly nervous about his land borders. His main attention was too often drawn to his empire's boundaries and beyond, and he ignored the growing problems within his realm. In 1904 he had declared war on Japan because he was concerned about that country's expansion, only to be humiliatingly and surprisingly beaten at sea and on land. In terms of this conflict with Japan "one of the main factors was the diversity of ideas and aims within the Russian government, which prevented the adoption of any definite policy."¹⁰ The Tsar always managed to surround himself with incompetent and too often self-seeking corrupt advisers. This failure against Japan meant he had to change his government structure (known as the Duma) but this was only papering over the cracks of an unwieldy system and his own sense of political control. On the western borders he was equally concerned about the potential German threat and encouraged Russian treaties with France.

It was not that the Russian State was impoverished; in the fourteen years prior to the Great War some 40,000 miles of railway lines were laid, armament factories flourished, and although prone to sudden bad harvests Russia was the world's greatest grain exporter.* This wealth was not enjoyed by the masses; the peasants often led short unpleasant lives and there were marked social differences within the class system. As one example of this social disparity the workers could be given corporal punishment for breaking minor infringements.† In this social attitude Russia appeared to be more medieval than many of its European neighbours. The small nobility was exempt from such a degrading and medieval form of punishment. The vast number of workers fell into two clear categories; agriculture which in 1913 had some 4.5 million workers, and heavy industries with some 2.4 million. Russia was a divided country, and it was the majority who felt excluded from the wealth and power of the tiny minority. There were deep social problems with heavy drinking and widespread venereal disease, especially syphilis. "The Russian Empire was deeply fissured between the government and the Tsar's subjects; between the capital and the provinces."¹¹

Russia was one country, but it had satellite possessions stretching from the Baltic to its far eastern boundaries, but there was no great sense of nationalism within Russia itself. Traditions and lifestyles tended to have a dependency on local tradition, and many of the intellectuals believed that the autocratic Romanov monarchy stifled any form of development of a Russian national spirit. Of the entire Russian Empire only about 44% were Russian and they were often less educated than the Polish and German constituents. Nicholas II and his predecessors (and his communist successors) regarded themselves as ruling a supranational state, but there was an extreme degree of social superiority, and anti-Semitism was rampant.

Before the Great War was a time of notable unrest and on Sunday the 9th January 1905 a peaceful procession of demonstrators, seeking some justice, was fired on by the military guarding the Winter Palace in St Petersburg.‡ This notorious incident is well-known as Bloody Sunday. It was not a good year for the monarchy since it was the same time that they had been defeated by the Japanese mentioned above, and it seemed as if the country were in

* Two-thirds of railway tracks were owned by the State.

† "Corporal punishment for all *meshchane* had been ended in 1906," Seton-Watson Hugh, *The Russian Empire 1801-1971* (Oxford: OUP, 1967) p.587, but the empire being so vast this punishment undoubtedly continued in places under local custom.

‡ The demonstration had been organised by a priest called Gapon who was concerned about the unfair dismissal of some factory workers; see Seton-Watson Hugh, *The Russian Empire 1801-1971* (Oxford: OUP, 1967) p.598

open revolt. At times the military had to be used to maintain not just stability but the monarchy as well; needless to note the Okhrana (secret police) were highly ruthless in tracking down dissidents, and often internally exiled them to Siberia to keep them away from the centre of political activities. The so-called advisory government was known as the Duma, and when this body suggested the common-sense solution of taking land from the gentry to assist the wider community, Nicholas II immediately dissolved the Duma.

Significantly it was during the year 1905 that Lenin proposed the possible overthrow of the Romanov dynasty to be followed by “a provisional revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.”¹² Lenin had perceived the incipient power of the urban workers as well as the so-called rural peasants.* For his part Nicholas II was not in tune with his own times or his country; events were slipping from his grasp. He surrounded himself with advisors many of whom were eccentric to say the least, Rasputin became the often-quoted extreme example. “Rasputin was also a man of dissolute habits, who became involved from time to time in scandalous scenes in public places,” but the Empress Alexandra was fixated on him because he seemingly helped her son with his haemophilia.¹³ The critical danger with Rasputin was his close association with the Tsar and his wife.[†]

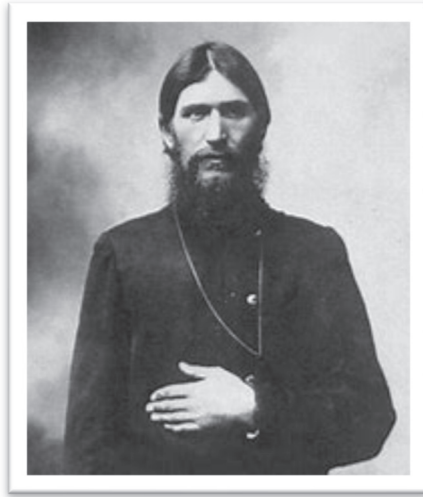
During the Great War Nicholas II was too often away to be near the front lines, and he appointed his wife to be responsible for matters at home. After the war their mutual correspondence was published in which it was revealed that she placed too much confidence in the views of the hated Rasputin, and no one dared contradict her or her advisers. It has been pertinently stated that “Nicholas and Alexandra were so obsessed with the dogma of autocracy that they subordinated everything to its maintenance.”¹⁴

As early as 1917 an appeal from a factory committee producing shells, reminded its workers that “the worker and the soldier represent a single entity...ruthlessly and pitilessly exploited by a small group of bloodthirsty capitalists, headed by Nicholas and Rasputin, which built its happiness upon our ignorance.”¹⁵ Everyone was conscious of the injustices and aware of the man Rasputin. In reality no one knows the truth about Rasputin, but the

* **Lenin** was born in Simbirsk in 1870; his real name was Vladimir Ulyanov. Lenin was his pseudonym when he became a political activist. His background was Jewish, German, Kalmyk and with Russian elements. He spent time in Siberia and it was the Okhrana's offensive which drove him to Switzerland in 1907.

† Lockhart the British diplomat described a scene at the Yare, a luxurious night-haunt with a drunken Rasputin, and the police were called but were too scared to intervene; see Lockhart R. H. Bruce, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London: The Folio Society, 2003) p.71

consensus was that he was an “unforgiveable stain on the Romanov throne.”¹⁶ On the other hand it is now known that Rasputin was a man of peace who opposed the war, and who advised Nicholas II against joining the affray.



Rasputin

Russia at the time of the Great War was difficult to govern because of its size, its diverse nationalities, and a place where provincial governors created their own regulations. The various nationalities and general demography were ill-defined, and this vagueness and ill-government, locally and centrally, often resulted in serious violence.

CHAPTER TWO

END OF ROMANOV DYNASTY

Poor government was not unique to Russia, but as noted was made more problematic by the sheer immensity of the Russian Empire. Europe was itself becoming badly unstable, the Austrians annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, the French and Russians failed to react, which was a diplomatic embarrassment if not defeat, which had followed on rapidly from the Japanese military victories in 1905. There was trouble in the Balkans, and the Russian Tsar was widely regarded as weak and his leadership as inept. As is well-known on the 28th June 1914 Princip assassinated the Archduke Ferdinand, which acted as the catalyst for the Great War.

Russia was no different from other countries in the sudden upsurge of nationalism. Lockhart, the British diplomat, noting “here was a Russia I had never known—a Russia inspired by a patriotism which seemed to have its roots deep down in the soil.”¹⁷ It has often been suggested that Russian nationalism had always been somewhat neutered, “yet the potential appeal of nationalism to the Russian people was very great. Like German nationalism, it was most marked in the borderlands.”¹⁸ When the prohibition on the sale of alcohol was announced (which meant a serious drop in taxes) it was accepted as a sign of necessary efficiency, but did not exclude the upper classes from their alcoholic beverages; “in restaurants the only difference was that one drank one’s alcohol from a teapot.”¹⁹

Later when news of a German break-through was announced, mobs in Moscow attacked shops owned by foreigners, even those who had German sounding names, which happened in other countries. Also shared with other nations was the belief that the war would be short and victorious, but in Russia the ramifications of the war were immense and occurred rapidly. The well-known battle of Tannenberg was a Russian disaster, some claiming this battle was the prelude to the revolution. There were indications of complete political and economic disorder, and although by 1916 the Russian Imperial Army had fourteen million conscripted men, mainly from the so-called peasant stock, there was a growing resentment and significant warning

signals appeared for the more observant.* Russia's situation was made yet more precarious when Turkey entered the war having always considered Russia their major enemy. The Russian monarch was the subject of considerable antagonism and, as noted, Nicolas II did not help himself by his family's reliance on the notorious Rasputin, and the Tsar's constant attendance at distant military Headquarters at Mogilëv, which was too far away from the central political activity.† His reliance on his wife's political control continued to be a source of mockery and criticism. There was a growing discontent at the inefficiency of the leadership at the front and at home, and despite the occasional good news the censure proved relentless.

Russia was suffering the most appalling and rapid inflation, and while the war industries had to take precedence, the indispensable commodity of food was in sharp decline. There were three factors which accounted for this disaster: "decline in output of grain, reduction of railway facilities available for civilian needs, and rapid increase of city populations."²⁰ The economy was a critical problem, and desperate bread queues became a daily characteristic on the streets; in early 1917 there was a serious general strike in Petrograd. The opposition to the government started to unite claiming they could do without the monarchy. The Great War was shattering not only royal families but was causing destabilisation; "except for the Great War, Lenin would have remained an émigré theorist scribbling in Swiss libraries."²¹ The outlawed Bolshevik committee urged its followers to ignore the Duma, to go on strike and demonstrate, and what was dubbed the February Revolution was soon in full stride. As it was Lenin returned to Russia by a train organised by the Germans leading Churchill to quip that the Germans had "transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia."²² The news about revolution in Russia had come as "just as much surprise to Lenin as to everyone else in Europe: he read about it in the Zurich papers only on March 2nd 1917."²³

"At the turn of 1917 there was no one in Russia, or anywhere else for that matter, who could have credibly foreseen that within the year the Russian State would have disintegrated—the Romanov dynasty swept aside," because the Tsar was weak and had no grip on the reality of all that surrounded him.²⁴ Nicholas II was not shrewd enough to recognise what was happening, he treated the Duma with disdain, used the ruthless Okhrana to arrest Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and any form or opposition, and utilised

* Such was the disaster that the Russian General Samsonov committed suicide.

† Rasputin was murdered on 29th December 1916 by Prince Felix Yusupov, a Right-wing Duma member called Purishkevich, and the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich. Hollywood film producers have always embellished this incident.

his forces to break-up strikes.* This was carried through with ruthless efficiency and created a struggle with which the Tsar's administration simply could not cope. By 1917 the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were "shaking off utopian visions and becoming political parties...but the Bolsheviks were never a conventional political party...it was first and foremost a conspiratorial organisation formed top-down and controlled by a small cohort," but it eventually succeeded.²⁵ Bolshevism up to this point was not identical to Leninism which was more an adaptation of Marxism, which was not at this time an official line of the Bolshevik stance.

On March 13th the Tsar's train had to turn back because news came through that the railway lines between Petrograd and Moscow were held by the revolutionaries. He had become the helpless nomadic Tsar lost on a train. Hardly with any warning and in transit on this train from Mogilëv Nicholas suddenly abdicated on 3rd March 1917. He knew it would be a mistake to hand on the problem to his young sick son, so he passed the monarchy onto his brother Michael The Grand Duke, after a brief discussion with some politicians declined, and Russia became a republic.

Beria at this stage had just turned eighteen years of age and during this same month had joined the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Also, during this month there had been some violence in factories and significantly in the fleet, and it was clear that the remnants of the government needed the support or consent of the growing Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries.[†] By the end of 1917 the administrative structure was tottering and near to collapse.

* The Mensheviks were stronger in the Ukraine and almost controlled the labour movement in Georgia. See Seton-Watson Hugh, *The Russian Empire 1801-1971* (Oxford: OUP, 1967) p.648

† The Bolshevik sailors often killed or tamed their officers and in terms of the Black Sea Fleet "German intelligence estimated that its striking power had been reduced by 99%." See McMeekin Sean in Brenton, Tony (Ed), *Historically Inevitable? Turning points of the Russian Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2016) p.102

CHAPTER THREE

1917-18 AND THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The year 1917 was a critical moment for Russia, and most people at home and abroad knew change was afoot. Leo Tolstoy's wife wrote in her diary on March 3rd "everyone is in a tense and expectant mood," and by August was making the entry "we read the paper avidly this evening and with great sorrow...dreadful rumours on all sides."²⁶ Despite the abdication of the Tsar the Republic's constitutional form of government remained contentious. The Kadets wanted to retain unitary administration, and they were somewhat divided on the issue of the nationally based territories, whereas the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries wanted to accede to national aspirations especially in the Ukraine.* The workers had more pressing needs than political policy and wanted land, bread, peace and freedom.



Lenin

* The Kadets were the Constitutional Democratic Party who wanted a constitutional monarchy as in Britain. They had dominated the Duma in 1906 but the Great War changed this with the onslaught of revolutionary parties.

The Bolsheviks were a minority in Petrograd but were becoming a potential force. As mentioned earlier the Germans in a devious move of pure subterfuge had put Lenin on a train for Moscow on April 3rd. Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev favoured some co-operation with the Menshevik Party, but Lenin halted this immediately; Lenin was the purist who demanded total Bolshevik control.* He constantly argued for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and for the inauguration of a socialist order. Lenin was a major influence and as one historian wrote “we should be careful not to exaggerate the impact of Lenin’s arrival on Russian politics, at least in the short run.”²⁷ Very few historians would disagree with this view of Lenin; his crucial appearance on the Russian scene changed not just Russia but had a huge impact on world events. His arrival at “Smolny [in central Petrograd] changed the course of history” and “without him the Bolsheviks would not have launched an insurrection on the 25th October.”²⁸

The Bolsheviks hated Nicolas II and believed their version of dictatorship was necessary, and to achieve their ambitions they were prepared to use any means including terror. Most of the Bolsheviks came from a working-class background, and at this stage they were not preoccupied by government, and they could conduct their work through propaganda; it was in this area that the intellectual Trotsky was useful.[†] Though their propaganda with its encouraging imagery had not been in the Bolsheviks’ favour in 1917, because they had the smallest output. In the summer of 1917 the “total press run of daily bourgeois newspapers in Petrograd was 1.5-1.6 million; for SR-Menshevik papers it was 640,000 to 740,000; while for the Bolsheviks it was approximately 80,000 (from 7th to 24th July the Bolsheviks were unable to publish their daily paper in Petrograd).”²⁹

Kerensky the war minister was still looking for military success and the Bolsheviks were under extreme and dangerous pressure, so much so that Lenin decided it was safer to hide in Finland. The Provisional Government had ordered troops to break up a demonstration in which people were killed, and the Bolsheviks had become for a time the clandestine party.

Kerensky had promised bread for the masses, but he could not keep his promises because the harvests were poor, and the military situation was deteriorating. Riga was lost by the Russians on August 22nd and Russian

* Lev **Kamanev** (1883-1936) was a revolutionary and one of the first seven members of the Politburo (the others were Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Stalin, Soloinikov and Bubnov). He was Trotsky’s brother-in-law and acting Premier during Lenin’s last year (1923-4). He was executed in August 1936 during Stalin’s purges.

[†] **Leon Trotsky’s** real name was Lev Davydovich Bronshtein. He was a Jew from south Ukraine and had fled prison and joined Lenin in London working on a Marxist journal called *Iskra*. Stalin later ordered his death in the infamous ice-axe attack.

soldiers began the long process of desertion. The war had reached a stage when the gap between the German frontlines and the Russian capital was too minimal for safety. The Army took up the cause of the Right-wing and there was a revolt led by General Kornilov, but this ended in outright fiasco.* The trouble was that the Provisional Government lacked any authority, and Kerensky had tried to rule through a five-man Directory. Nevertheless, the prospects were daunting because the food supplies were dangerously low with national economics in sharp decline, and the landowners found themselves under constant attack.

Lenin, who had been hiding away in Finland, had been quick to notice the disarray with the various soviets who started turning towards the Bolsheviks for leadership. Lenin returned and although hiding in the outskirts of the city, he called for an insurrection, but there was no military general prepared to attempt a *coup* against Kerensky. The central power was breaking down in Petrograd and across Russia, the workers were beginning to rise, and soldiers were controlling their officers, and it was apparent that Kerensky was losing control. The Romanov imperial family was under house arrest and Trotsky, Stalin, and Sverdlov started preparing the Bolsheviks for armed action.† Trotsky was important when it came to organisation. The British diplomat Lockhart wrote that Trotsky was “a revolutionary with the temperament of an artist and with undoubted physical courage, he had never been and never could be a good party man” which would one day be his undoing.³⁰

The Bolsheviks moved at an increased pace and Kerensky was overthrown on 25th October 1917, the Winter Palace fell to the insurgents, and all the perceived opponents were threatened with ruthless retaliation. The Bolsheviks pinpointed capitalism as the cause of the Great War, and they claimed that social utility was better than private profit; to the oppressed this would have sounded attractive.

* There had been a serious feud between Kerensky and Kornilov which virtually assured the success of the Bolshevik revolution, yet “none of the participants in this affair desired what turned out to be its outcome. Yet they made it all but inevitable.” Pipes Richard in Brenton, Tony (Ed), *Historically Inevitable? Turning points of the Russian Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2016) p.109

† **Yakov Sverdlov** (1885-1919) returned to Petrograd and was elected to the Central Committee; it is sometimes alleged he played a major role in the death of the Romanov family. He died, it is sometimes claimed from typhus, but more probably the flu pandemic in 1919.



October Revolution

Lenin made it abundantly clear from the beginning he wanted a dictatorship founded on a class-based discrimination with the imposition of his ideological beliefs. In April 1917 he preached and published *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution* known as the *April Theses*. His first statement related directly to the war: "In our attitude towards the war, which under the new government... unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialistic war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to revolutionary 'defencism' is permissible."³¹ In short he then pointed out that Russia was to pass into the second phase of the revolution, which must place the power in the hands of the proletariat, no support for the Provisional Government, no seeking a parliamentary democracy, an agrarian programme to be shifted to the soviets of agricultural deputies, and the nationalization of land. This stood in stark contrast with other Left-wing groups who thought it axiomatic that socialism would involve universal-suffrage democracy, but Lenin claimed communism demanded an intermediate stage namely the dictatorship by the proletariat. "Under communism there would be no political or national oppression, no economic exploitation. Humanity would have reached its ultimate stage of development."³² Despite the clamour and initial success many of the Bolsheviks worried whether they would succeed, and it was jokingly claimed they were constantly sitting on their suitcases ready to run. The Bolsheviks used force and violence as their natural weapons, and called their government The Council of People's Commissars, widely known by the Russian acronym of Sovnarkom.

There was resistance and the Cossacks led by a General Krasnov were defeated, and there were minor outbreaks of resistance elsewhere. In October various decrees were published which called for peace for all peoples, for peasants to make agrarian reforms, the claim that the land was the people's legacy, and there should be an eight-hour working day.

As with the Tsars the difficulty was the sheer vastness of Russia and its empire, and keeping control was often patchy if not virtually impossible. It demanded ruthless control and on December 7th Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) formed the Extraordinary Commission (or Cheka) to eliminate opposition to the October revolution. This was to be the forerunner of the OGPU, then the NKVD and the KGB, (see Appendix Four). The secret police services in Russia had always been frightening but for many it seemed the only way to maintain control. Many had thought the Bolsheviks would never be able to rule because they had spent most of their lives on the run from the Okhrana. However, Lenin was both clever and shrewd, and gave many reasons for the need to seize power ranging from military to political arguments, but above all it would mean that "Lenin would emerge as the political master."³³

In terms of non-Russian areas Lenin offered independence to Finland and German occupied Poland, but it appeared that Lenin, and especially Stalin had every intention to keep the rest of the empire intact. There would be considerable contention as to how to resolve these empire-national problems. Polling arrangements were made by November, and they were "to remain the only such elections in Russian until 1993."³⁴ However, to the horror of the Bolsheviks they only gained a quarter of the votes. This ultimately led to the use of force with some local revolts, and in January 1918 the Bolshevik led-forces occupied Kiev demonstrating their determination.

Eventually negotiations with the Germans were held at Brest-Litovsk where the Germans demanded that Sovnarkom should allow self-determination to the border countries. The Germans had advanced from Riga and taken Dvinsk which was only about five-hundred miles from Petrograd, giving Sovnarkom serious pause for thought, not least in rapidly moving the government to Moscow. Despite the final and somewhat nervous negotiations, and with much contention on the Bolshevik side, the German situation was resolved, and some vast areas such as the Ukraine, Belorussia and much of the Baltic Region were disjoined from Russia. "The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk created a 'German order' in East-Central Europe," and "took from Russia all the territories it had acquired since the reign of Peter the Great," but the main significance was the independence of Ukraine which had been Tsarist territory since the seventh century.³⁵

The Bolsheviks renamed themselves the Russian Communist Party but their main problem, once the German situation had been resolved, was the desperate need to restore the economy. The sheer vastness of the country continued to make it appear ungovernable, and it was not helped by the appalling economic situation which meant that they could not feed themselves or have adequate arms. Populations were insecure, and on the move, production was minimal, and in places starvation levels were serious. The Bolsheviks had taken power in this brief space of time, but it was now a question of survival; especially since they did not have a mandate from the Constituent Assembly and were divided amongst themselves, particularly over the question of the borderlands.

Lenin spoke to the peasants and gave them permission and the impetus to seize land. A few wealthy families for too long had owned vast tracts of land, living off the wealth and their workers who had struggled to survive. A similar call was made in the urban areas where factory committees took over the industries, which meant the State was gaining a variety of enterprises.

It was not plain sailing, and there were signs of revolt against the emerging Communism; General Kornilov had escaped house arrest in Petrograd and travelled south to join with General Alekseev in calling for a volunteer army to fight back. There was a sense of panic and “about three million people had fled the country in the first years after the October Revolution.”³⁶ There was a high degree of local anarchy when the people held strongly to their parochial traditions with a sense of loyalty. As was often the case in Russia, local loyalty was deemed more important than the overall schemes of national intention. As in any country food supplies or rather the lack of them was the serious cause of concern and dissension. As the workers, peasants and soldiers were mobilised by Communist activists, the threat was issued that the person who did not work did not eat. As these forces were mobilised Lenin made it clear that the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) was going to be a class-based dictatorship.

Lenin was all too conscious of the food and economic situation and he urged a more cautious approach in industrial nationalisation and agricultural collectivism. Bukharin disagreed and wanted the pace speeded up, and this created some internal friction as Lenin looked to what he referred to as a mixed economy called “state capitalism.”* Food-economics was the

* Nikolai Ivanovich **Bukharin** (1888-1938) was a Bolshevik Revolutionary and a prolific writer on Revolutionary theory. He was the editor of *Pravda* who upheld NEP policy. By 1924 he was Stalin's chief ally but parted company over Stalin's Collectivisation. He was expelled from the Politburo in 1929 and was killed in March 1938 during the purges.

continuation of one of the major problems within Russia, and especially during Soviet history in trying to overcome the breakdown of basic food supplies. "The challenge of securing food to meet the needs of the state generated almost continuous conflict in the Soviet countryside during the Civil Wars, pitting village farming communities against state procurement squads," and this issue of food supplies would remain a dominant issue for decades to come.³⁷ It would later lead to the great Kulak purges. Lenin's authoritative approach meant the Party monopolised debate and they shut down the newspapers of the Kadet party, as well as the Mensheviks and Socialist-revolutionary party. This "force gave the communists an unrivalled advantage in countering the anti-Bolshevik current of opinion."³⁸ The Bolsheviks also tried to ensure that artists and any intelligentsia were supportive of the party, but this was not so easy. The Soviet order was extremely disorderly for a time yet movement towards a centralised ideocratic dictatorship of a single party had started.

CHAPTER FOUR

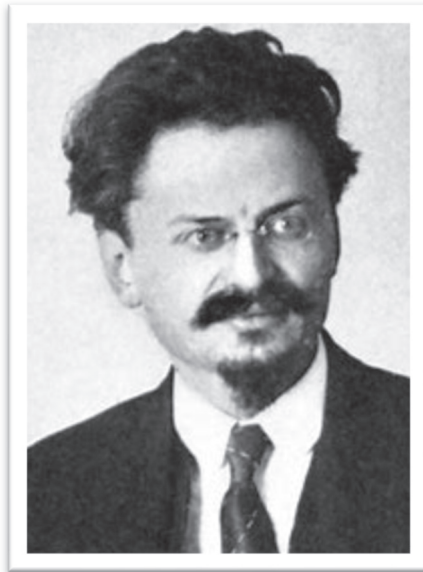
CIVIL WARS 1918-1921

In the overall scheme of Russian history, the years of 1918-21 are often referred to as the Russian Civil War, but it was a jig-saw puzzle of many civil wars. There was not the one civil war but dozens in which the Red Army eventually gained the upper hand. Lenin and Trotsky used the terms civil war and class struggle as interchangeable terms, sometimes because of their principles, and sometimes to obfuscate what was happening as they tightened their grip on power.

The term “class” had been on the lips of the revolutionaries since power had been grasped in Petrograd in 1917. Those who initiated the revolution did not “at first imagine a new Russian or even a Soviet nation. Instead, being Marxist internationalists, they imagined a class, the international proletariat.”³⁹ It has been suggested that the Bolsheviks were eventually obliged to invent classes based on Marxist theory. After the Civil War they were in a different world where class conflict was no longer the priority. Later they would study the issue of class trying to establish a classifiable composition. When education became widely accessible new rules based on academic or egalitarian rules took a hold, but the need to codify “class” took years, and it was a new class which emerged, but not spoken about; the word “comrade” took on a political significance. Later there would come into existence a privileged elite in the party who lived a very different life-style to the masses, but out of personal safety they tried to keep their new social standing to themselves.

The education was politically based, and when Stalin’s daughter later went to university to study history and social sciences she wrote, “we seriously studied Marxism, analysed Marx, Engels, Lenin, and of course, Stalin. The conclusion I carried away from these studies was that the theoretical Marxism and Communism we had studied had nothing whatsoever to do with actual conditions in the USSR.”⁴⁰

The outside world was nonplussed about what was happening as the 1914-18 Great War had ground on to its conclusion. There were attempts to wreck the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the British made every effort to support the anti-Bolshevik organisations; they wanted Sovnarkom overthrown.



Trotsky

It transpired that Trotsky became an impressive military commissar, who transformed the Red Army into a fighting force. He was utterly ruthless, and frightened deserters were shot on the spot even if they were dedicated Communist activists. He even organised a competition for a new cap and tunic, organised his own war-train equipped with a map room and printing press. Later in March 1919 Trotsky presented a report on the Red Army to the First Congress of the Communist International. In this address Trotsky showed how he had turned a socialist army into a professional force which had been confirmed by their triumph at Kazan. He had used terror and single-mindedness, but he created fear among the other leaders and even ordinary members. He stated to the conference that “since May of last year, we passed from a volunteer army, from the Red Guards, to an army based on compulsory military service, but we accept into our army only workers and peasants who do not exploit the labour of others.”⁴¹ Some may have had doubts about the veracity of his statements, but the fact remained that Trotsky had managed from the chaos of revolution to produce an effective and disciplined fighting force.

In 1918 there had been rapid changes. On November 9th Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated, and on the 17th July the Tsar and his family were murdered. Regarding the slaughter of the Romanovs there appears to have been

evidence implicating the Central Committee in this action. Lenin meanwhile was looking for Left-wingers to inspire a revolt in Germany and in the Baltic states, in what was a self-evident desire for establishing Soviet Republics. It was a time of extreme brutality, and violence increased dramatically as Lenin ordered the Cheka to kill any resisters. Communism and its ideals would never tolerate any opposition, and this became its habitual characteristic.

However, there was an attempted assassination on Lenin on 30th August 1918 which produced what has been called the Red Terror.* It has been estimated that some 1300 prisoners were shot in Petrograd alone. Bruce Lockhart who lost a Russian Jewish friend in this iniquitous retribution reckoned the number of killed to be 700 precisely; any numerical accuracy for these deeds will always be elusive.⁴² The Cheka and its massacres became common place. None of this resolved the central and critical issue because the national economics remained a total disaster. The use of money as wages was proving worthless as “currency depreciated to 0.006% of its pre-war value by 1921.”⁴³ The Bolsheviks in military, economics, and political terms were proving patchy in their overall control. Lenin wanted a centralised power, but there was some disagreement as to how this could be achieved because some resented the widespread killing by the Cheka.

In January 1919 two inner significant sub-committees were introduced. The “Politburo” came into existence and took on the responsibility of politics, economics, and international relationships; and the “Orgburo” which was an expanded Secretariat in control of inner party organisation. Sovnarkom’s authority was slowly but permanently reduced, not least because Lenin chaired the Politburo. The Founding members were Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Kamenev and Krestinski.[†] It was not a comfortable team-configuration because Stalin never liked taking orders from Trotsky. Lenin was aware that

* “Few in the West were aware that on 30 August 1918 a volley of bullets, fired at close range, came within inches of ending Lenin’s life;” it has often been claimed that the British were behind this assassin by a woman called Fanny Kaplan, also known as Dora. See Sixsmith Martin in Brenton, Tony (Ed), *Historically Inevitable? Turning points of the Russian Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2016) p.178. The British Diplomat Robert Bruce Lockhart was even arrested: “at 3.30 a.m. I was awakened by a rough voice...as I opened my eyes I looked up into the steely barrel of a revolver” they were dangerous times even for British diplomats; he spent a month in the Lubyanka and then in Kremlin charged with the “Lockhart Plot.” See Lockhart R. H. Bruce, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London: The Folio Society, 2003) p.239 and p.243

† **Nikolay Krestinski** (1883-1938) was one of the early revolutionaries but supported Trotsky. He was removed from the Politburo in 1921 and was a diplomat until 1927. Unlike most at his Show-Trial he would not admit guilt and was killed in March 1938 in the purges.

Stalin and Trotsky would not work well together because he observed that Stalin was harsh, and “even in 1917 Trotsky had realised that no fruitful collaboration was possible with Stalin.”⁴⁴ However, it was clear that despite Trotsky’s undoubted intelligence he underestimated Stalin’s cunning. Even at this stage of events there were growing tensions between the leading figures as their different personalities and aspirations took the central stage.

In September 1919 “a shocking report landed on Lenin’s desk. It showed that the Smolny, citadel of the October Revolution, was full of corruption” which was highly likely given the times.⁴⁵ Later Lenin would live in just three rooms in the Kremlin, and he was never motivated by money. Stalin settled at one time into the country mansion of a former oil magnate, and other party leaders had their own luxurious residences.* The mercenary comrades tended to come from the Cheka probably because it was their task to sort out the bourgeoisie, and they abused their power. Lenin explained the corruption as an illness which arose from the influence of the rich.

By March 1921 Soviet republics were taking shape in Belorussia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. It was hypothetically intended to have been a federal alliance. The Red Army was ideologically driven by Trotsky and Lenin, and they carried out a violent persecution against the Russian Orthodox Church in particular, during which many bishops and priests were killed. As Solzhenitsyn noted the political leaders wanted “to remove the existing leadership and replace it with one which would have only one ear turned to heaven and the other to the Lubyanka.”⁴⁶ In the 1920s to give children religious education was classified as a political crime under Article 58-10 of the Code. Lenin wanted to introduce atheism by persuasion, and he ignored the fact that “several clergymen of the Orthodox Church also took an anti-capitalist position.”⁴⁷ The Russian Orthodox Church had split between the traditionalist and renovationist wings with the latter introducing revolutionary theology. It has been claimed that a Bolshevik called Lunacharsky converted many bourgeois intellectuals to the cause and brought Gorky into the fold. Lunacharsky had been an adherent of the Orthodox faith and started the “Bolshevising” movement inside the Russian Church.⁴⁸

Later in 1926 an “All-Russian Conference on Anti-religious Struggle convened to work out new approaches in promoting atheism...and explained that anti-religious propaganda had to be based on Marxist-Leninist teaching,” which encouraged some Komsomol groups to become over-active when they brutally disrupted services.⁴⁹ The Orthodox Church

* According to his daughter “The house in which I spent my childhood once belonged to the younger Zubalov, an oil magnate from Batum.” Alliluyeva Svetlana, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p.26

had been under attack in one form or another from the start of the revolution; however, it did not stop a crowd in 1922 which had gathered in Petrograd to protest at the removal of church treasures. There had been a “wave of dissatisfaction stirred up by the Decree on the Confiscation of Church Valuables, passed a month earlier—a central episode in what might be termed ‘the Bolshevik Reformation.’”⁵⁰ Yet Russia remained in many places a country of traditional culture and “religion was inseparable from the general cycle of peasant life. It gave it order and meaning.”⁵¹ The religious impulse deep in many Russian people was never eliminated, but they subdued or hid their worship and belief for safety reasons. During World War Two Stalin found it necessary to pander to the Church. On a visit to a Russian church in 1970 this writer found it packed, but only with elderly women; the only men were the two clergy. Church attendance was still frowned upon by the authorities.

The Red Army won their internal war, Germany lost the Great War, and British industrialists wanted to resume trade in January 1920. International affairs appeared to be calming down, at least on the surface. The Supreme Allied Council lifted the economic blockade on the RSFSR, and the Bolsheviks had held their own with their reinforced arbitrary rule which had no intention of holding free elections. They started the cleansing of the Party; the Russian word is *chistka* which means purge and was an ominous note for the future. However, “this sprawling state ruled a disgruntled society, and there was much to give resentment” because there were serious food shortages, disease and malnutrition which killed a staggering eight million people in 1918-20.⁵²

There were serious external conflicts with the Poles when Józef Piłsudski invaded the Ukraine. Piłsudski was chased out and Lenin thought he would then take his revolution west into Poland, but lost the battle on the River Vistula, and Lenin had to change his mind about taking the revolution west on the point of a bayonet.

At home Lenin had created a centralised one-ideology dictatorship of a single party which allowed no opposition. The party was strictly organised, and the security police were efficient during this post-civil war period. There was still discontent, mainly because the food situation had not improved, and the organisation and administration were patchy; the grain harvest of 1920 was a disaster compared to the days before the Great War. Lenin was obliged to introduce the New Economic Policy (NEP) which permitted room for a degree of private commercial activity. This was needed in factories for speed of output and an increase in productivity. The NEP was to be a point of contention for many years. As early as 1921 March 16th an Anglo-Soviet Trade agreement was signed, and private retail shops were

allowed. It was a time of dissent and revolt, perhaps better described as mutinies in some factories and even in a naval garrison on Kronstadt Island; they were eventually quelled.

By March 1921 Georgia had been re-conquered and the Red Army had largely restored the boundaries of the traditional Russian Empire. Stalin wanted to deprive countries of any formal independence and looked to what he called federalism; the various States were simply annexed. Lenin, who had been sick from a stroke won against Stalin's engorging of other republics, and he produced the concept of a federation to be called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which meant Russia had its own boundaries which would not be a reality until the late 1980s. This led to major deportations and created a sense of nationalism which transmitted its own potential problems. Stalin was generally regarded as a pragmatic man and his only noticeable difference from Lenin "was his reluctance to accord non-Russian nationalities the degree of autonomy represented by the proclamation of the USSR."⁵³

By the end of the Civil War the theory of Marxism was being shaped by the Bolsheviks in the world in which they found themselves. The key leaders of the moment had to work within the constraints of their new world and the situation as it evolved. The question of leaders and the developing circumstances had been clearly foreseen by Marx when he had written that "people make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."⁵⁴

It had become critical for the Communist leadership that their ideology was instilled into the working classes. It was regarded as important that the peasants were soaked in Bolshevism and not the local traditions to which they adhered.* "In Russia, the revolution brought into sharp focus this shift from an administrative, territorial state to a government one;" Nicholas II had ruled huge geographical areas, "but the new soviet administration looked not so much to govern land but the people."⁵⁵

The secret police were of paramount importance and from 1923 the Cheka became known as the United Main Political Administration (OGPU). The OGPU surveyed the mood of the people and continued to persecute the Church. The "mood of the people" was and still is important to those who govern. In Germany Göbbels carried out similar surveys and in Britain there were mass observation exercises. Lenin had some Bishops killed for not

* "For many peasants, the only way to cope with the challenges of a difficult environment lay in preserving as many village traditions as possible;" this had been true in Tsarist times and remained so during the early communist period. Lewin Moshe, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016) p.72

selling church treasures to help famine relief. The OGPU were ordered to demoralise the once powerful Orthodox Church and split the church by indirect methods. Areas of Islamic influence were left alone, and citizens who worshipped in churches lost any chance of preferment. The OGPU personnel were also directed to attack any class enemies and especially intellectuals: “the aim was to insulate Soviet society from the bacillus of ideas alien to Bolshevism.”⁵⁶

The Party made considerable efforts at widening educational opportunities and founded the well-known Komsomol for young people. The rapid expansion of the Komsomol groups in “the mid-1920s was largely due to peasant recruits, as they joined much more willingly than workers,” and the rural Komsomol, as noted above, soon became provocative in the anti-religious campaigns.⁵⁷ In the meantime the OGPU carefully monitored strikes and other disruptive incidents to ensure the organisers were dismissed. The New Economic Policy Lenin had introduced was moderately successful in quelling many of the problems, but it had inevitably not managed total stability. The problems of ruling a vast geographical area had been beyond the Tsars, but “by 1921 the Bolshevik bureaucracy was ten times greater than that of the Tsars,” and it remained a difficult problem to resolve.⁵⁸

CHAPTER FIVE

LENIN TO STALIN



The Young Stalin

The Politburo members were divided over the NEP, which was not surprising because even Lenin regarded it as only a necessary safety valve for stability. Nevertheless, as a body they were all too aware of the continuing poverty amongst the working-classes in towns and especially rural villages.* The NEP was a drawn-out process and the famine persisted

* Solzhenitsyn noted that “nowadays many commonly reproach the village with its political obtuseness and conservatism. But before the war the village to a man, or overwhelmingly, was sober, much more sober than the town: it took no part at all in the deification of Daddy Stalin.” Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.340

especially in the Volga provinces, where the Bolsheviks portrayed themselves as the urban allies of the peasants, but it was mere propaganda. The starting point of the NEP in March 1921 was marked by strikes and agitation with the Bolshevik authorities in Petrograd and Moscow, it included workers demanding free trade and elections, and an end to the Cheka repression. Some historians claim that the 1920s was a Golden Age in Russian history, and the NEP was regarded as an alternative to Stalinism: "The 1920s have been hailed as an example of at least one period in Soviet history which was a success, in economics, politics, and especially in terms of culture."⁵⁹ They had started to concentrate on the educational improvements if only to use it as a means of indoctrination. Trotsky had wanted more state investment and had disagreed with Lenin over this issue. At the Party Congress in March 1922 Lenin organised for Trotsky to be argued off his perch on this economic issue. Lenin referred to the NEP as a retreat because the country had to recover from the devastation of previous years, and he demanded a small degree of capitalism.

Lenin himself was ill and spent most of his time in a hospital in Gorki some thirty miles outside the capital. Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin handed Stalin the key to the secretariat and "felt sure he would dance to their tune," but it soon became apparent that when Lenin appointed him "Stalin had his own flute."⁶⁰ It was at this stage that many regarded this moment in time as the beginning of the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin had approved Stalin as Party General Secretary, and although Lenin at first relied on Stalin they soon disagreed over the vexed question of what type of Federation was best for the future, consequently Lenin turned back to Trotsky.* Amongst the problems which had been faced by the Bolsheviks was this vexed question of a coherent nationalities policy. Lenin had preferred the right of self-determination, but he acknowledged there were problems as to how national self-determination could fit in with a unitary Soviet state. The arguments were long and varied and led to internal disagreement. Nationalism was regarded by many as "a uniquely dangerous mobilising ideology because it had the potential to forge an all-class alliance for national goals."⁶¹ Nationalism could therefore be regarded as concealing a dangerous ideology. Yet it was understood that nationalism was an unavoidable attitude which all peoples had to pass through on their political journey. The arguments were long and intricate, and the Bolsheviks attempted to fuse the question of national territory and demands with the socialist needs for an economic and political unitary state. As the late twentieth century was to demonstrate the problem was never resolved.

* **Stalin's** real name was Joseph Dzhugashvili; born in Gori in Georgia.

However, “within ten years of his dispute with Lenin, Stalin transformed nationality policy from a series of concessions to non-Russians into a powerful weapon of imperial state-building.”⁶²

By the end of 1922 Lenin had more strokes so he set about writing his political testimony. At the beginning of 1923 Lenin launched an attack on Stalin, but it was too late because on the 6th March 1923 Lenin suffered another major stroke; he was too weak to contribute to developments, and he died in 1924 on the 21st January. Trotsky was himself ill and distant from the central activities, so Stalin headed the funeral committee. Past disagreements were discreetly put aside, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad, reverence for the dead Lenin was imposed, and his body was embalmed and put on display in Red Square, and now came the moment for settling who would be his heir.* The same manipulation for leadership would not happen again until 1953 on the death of Stalin.

During this period of the NEP, Communist history “had been largely seen as the interaction of prominent personalities.”⁶³ Prior to and during Lenin’s death there followed the struggle between the leading Bolsheviks (Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin) as to who should emerge out of the uncertainty into paramount position. However, only a mere “two years after the civil war Russian society already lived under Stalin’s virtual rule, without being aware of the ruler’s name...strangely he was voted in and moved into all his positions of power by his rivals,” and when they realised what had happened “they found him immovable.”⁶⁴ Stalin was the emerging leader. “The key to Stalin’s power was his control of the Party apparatus in the Provinces,” and “he could promote his friends and dismiss opponents.”⁶⁵ This was a form of power which Stalin understood well, which soon made him suspicious of any close supporters, (and later in life this included Beria) and distrustful of everyone. It was this paranoia which led to the later notorious purges. As a consequence, “the years of Stalin’s rule stand out as one of the most violent chapters of the twentieth century.”⁶⁶ He was creating a state ruled by fear, and the Russian historian Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko alluded to George Orwell’s book *1984*, which a Russian could go to prison for reading, noting that this “kind of acknowledgement is worth more than any literary prize.”⁶⁷

The power struggle started with an unpleasant political tussle starting with Zinoviev and Kamenev joining with Stalin to stop Trotsky using

* Stalin would later join him in his tomb for a time but was later removed and his body “was carried out feet first. In peasant demonology this ensured that the evil dead would not return to haunt the living.” Lewin Moshe, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016)

arguments about the New Economic Policy.* It continued with each potential candidate presenting parts of Lenin's political testimony to demonstrate he was Lenin's natural political successor. Stalin emerged with his usual brutal treatment of his colleagues, stressing that the Party was the "institutional cornerstone of the October Revolution," and in this claim he had the growing support of Bukharin.⁶⁸

Foreign affairs became an issue as Bukharin and Zinoviev were meddling in Germany's affairs which was a serious misjudgement, this stood in contrast with Stalin wishing to consolidate socialism on the home front. Eventually Russia and Germany signed the Rapallo Treaty (the two pariah states had little to lose and much to gain), and a Soviet-Chinese agreement was signed. However, the major arguments tended to centre on the NEP.

The political machinations were fast moving and in January 1925 Trotsky was not only removed as the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, but he lost his seat in the Politburo. The infighting was bitter and in May 1927 when the Chinese Chiang Kai-Shek murdered thousands of Chinese communists, Trotsky was quick to complain that the Politburo was losing control. Nevertheless, by the end of 1927 Stalin and Bukharin had won the race, and the NEP was working and guaranteed for just a few more years. The economic problems continued to remain the critical issue because it was apparent that the Russian leadership lacked expertise in this area, which meant that the political problems were far from over. During these fraught years the man Beria in 1926 had become Chairman of the Georgian Cheka now the OGPU, and although not central to the Politburo tussle, he was already part of the new Bolshevik type system.

During this period, starting with the NEP the Bolshevik Party had "turned from the fighting machine of 1920 into an administrative elite. The old core of Bolshevik intelligentsia was drowned in the sea of new recruits. From 1924 to 1926, in just two years, 800,000 new members were admitted."⁶⁹ However, Stalin from 1928, started to go "his own way" with his selected supporters. He followed Lenin in the fundamental policy of the single-party with its single Left-wing ideology and economic dominance. However, he soon developed internal enemies who saw a rupture with the Leninism to which they veered, and much of the rift was to do with the

* **Grigory Zinoviev** (1883-1939) was a Bolshevik revolutionary and one of the original members of the first Politburo in 1917 to manage the revolution. He became the head of Comintern and tried to make Germany communist in the 1920s. Stalin dismissed him in 1926 and he was killed following the first major Show-Trial in August 1936. He is often related to the Zinoviev letter urging British communists to revolt, but this was most probably a forgery.

vexatious NEP. The year of 1928 was when the party leadership started to move away from NEP and relied more on the coercive collection of grain.⁷⁰

In early 1928 Stalin had taken himself off to the Urals and Siberia to investigate the fall-off in grain supplies. He gave orders that the grain stocks were to be delivered to the government, thus initiating an action behind the backs of many in the Politburo with the system of collective farms. Although he took this journey, he never visited a single village or met a peasant, but simply went to Novosibirsk, Barnaul, and Omsk, gave the necessary orders which were always accompanied by ominous threats. Then he left, and this was a “truly historic visit. No second appearance of the Supreme Leader among the people is known to history.”⁷¹ He used Article 107 of the criminal code which referred to the withholding of grain, to prosecute Kulaks and others, but when he returned to Moscow “Bukharin questioned these brutal excesses,” which from the point of view of Bukharin’s own long-term safety was a mistake.⁷² It was becoming self-evident to those close to Stalin that it was dangerous to disagree with him.

Stalin would soon seek the same policy for his five-year plans for industry. This was a sure signal that the NEP was being dismantled. Private commercial firms started to disappear, and the Kulaks came under violent repression.* This occurred during the Great Depression, and although the Soviets were regarded as pariahs, there was a degree of respect outside Russia for the way they used authoritarian means to make progress. This was the time when dictatorships were emerging in Italy, Germany, and Spain, and democracy was being widely questioned. There were many in the democracies who wondered whether some form of benign and powerful leadership by one person would resolve the economic problems. This error of judgement would take two fraught decades to unravel. Stalin was not an economist with conclusive plans, but he had an overall scheme that the state was in charge, and he was running the state. He had his economic adherents and a gathering support for his form of direct but crude control.

His leadership was not appreciated by everyone not least Trotsky and his old supporter Bukharin, and the main divisions tended to run down the major fault-line of the NEP. Bukharin edited *Pravda* and used his literary

* The Kulaks tended to be independent and sometimes better off peasants. The term soon became associated with any peasant who refused to hand over his grain. They were soon regarded as “class-enemies.” The ownership of one cow designated a peasant as poor, if they had two then they were moved into another tax bracket, those who had more were socially classified and taxed as kulaks. See Brovkin Vladimir, *Russia after Lenin* (London: Routledge, 1998) p.168

skills to inform the readers that the NEP was under attack.* Stalin had started the long process of a national requisitioning campaign, and this frequently meant downright violence which was not appreciated by all members of the Politburo. This led to a personal clash between Stalin and Bukharin. It was a time of tension; Bukharin was no push-over and had stood up against Lenin and Trotsky on various issues. He was a sophisticated and cultured man, who although no saint, objected to Stalin's violent approach. Bukharin did not have the necessary ability or strength to oppose the more dangerous Stalin, and the two men hardly conversed with one another. Bukharin had witnessed Stalin's response to a supposed counter-revolutionary plot in the Shakhty coalmines in the Don Basin, which ended with a publicised Show Trial, followed by executions and long-term imprisonments. This was to become a characteristic of the Stalin leadership, and would invoke considerable fear even amongst the leaders; it was an indicator of the changing times caused by the nature of the man at the top.

In the meantime, Stalin used finance from the countryside and pressed on with his industrial five-year plans. It showed some signs of growth, so when Bukharin argued for Lenin's NEP at the Central Control Commission in 1929, he appeared to be arguing against success, and Stalin had him accused of "factionalism." He was upbraided for this fault which was considered serious enough to have Trotsky deported just a few weeks previously for the same felony.†

The grain prices were not outstanding on the international market because of the world slump, and short-term credits had to be organised for the five-year plan. Stalin was ensuring that Russia was not in any military confrontation as he worked on his form of socialism at home, and he ensured his growing grip on overall power. In this policy he deviated from Lenin and Trotsky who had looked towards a European socialist revolution. Stalin's understanding of what was happening abroad was never perceptive, and he frequently failed to comprehend what was going on in other countries. For Stalin collectivisation was the overall answer to all his schemes, and he turned to Molotov to make sure the Central Party agreed.‡

* *Pravda* had been the Bolshevik paper first produced in St Petersburg in 1913; the Menshevik paper had been called the *Luch*.

† In January 1928 by decision of the Politburo Trotsky was exiled to Alma-Ata; "Stalin had a satanic hatred of Trotsky and at the same time feared him. He feared Trotsky's indisputable authority as a leader of the revolution and the Red Army and his great popularity." See Antonov-Ovseyenko Anton, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny* (London: Harper & Row, 1981) p.108

‡ **Vyacheslav Molotov** (1890-1986) was an old Bolshevik who became a leading figure during the 1920s as a protégé of Stalin. He was Chairman of the People's

For Stalin collectivisation was better expressed as dekulakisation, which meant repressing the class enemy of the richer peasant. Farms were to be amalgamated and run for the state which meant the Kulaks were the ones who would suffer the most. To enforce this policy, it was decided to use a voluntary force of young men because the task was probably too much for the military and OGPU; by doing this Stalin and his supporters won the agrarian war. It has been estimated that during these years of 1932-3 some four to five million people died.⁷³ Other historians offer lower figures, but the fact remains that precise numbers were probably not known at the time and will never surface today.* It would not be until the 1950s that an agricultural output would be reached which even equalled the figures attained before the Great War. It was a barbaric time when life was treated as of no significance, and the individual was not important. The state was paramount, and the poverty in the countryside and lack of food remained severe. In the towns labour was utilised from those fleeing the countryside, and too many potential workers were in prison or exile, and these numbers grew exponentially during these years. The abundance of prisoners increased as there were localised revolts in the countryside because of what was happening to the local traditions, and the scarcity of food.

In the remotest of places and among the leaders there grew an atmosphere of a “witch-hunt.” Stalin was now using the Party as a weapon to bring people into line through sheer terror. There was even a cleansing of Party members. Bukharin survived by accepting Party policy, but from overseas Trotsky persisted in sending his written criticisms. Many people turned against Bolshevism amongst the peasants and workers, and Stalin at this stage made enemies in the Party. “Collectivisation, dekulakization, urban show-trials and the forced-labour penal systems had wrought suffering as great as had occurred in the Civil War.”⁷⁴ Millions starved to death and at least a million if not more were moved to faraway isolated spots, where survival was barely possible. Stalin’s cohorts obeyed his cruel commands because “great power thus acts like a black hole that warps the very space around it,” and Stalin almost exercised a form of gravitational pull on his henchmen.⁷⁵

Commissars 1939-41 and Minister of the Foreign Office 1939-1949 and again in 1953-1956. He was First Deputy Premier between 1942-1957 but was dismissed from the Presidium by Khrushchev. He was aware of the Katyn massacre, and probably involved, and opposed Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation.

* Gellately wrote that in 1930 and 1931 some 1.8 million people were deported to special settlements in the remotest of places, see Gellately Robert, *Stalin’s Curse, Battling for Communism in War and Cold War* (Oxford: OUP, 2013)

“Was this intentional mass murder? Researchers have scoured the archives, but no documents have been found to substantiate the claim,” but whatever the motive the intention and the brutality of the camps had the same effect.⁷⁶ By 1926 there were evident signs that the countryside was in ferment, the 1925 rural elections had pointed to a communist defeat, and “the rise of the Peasant Union movement, the curtailment of production, the shrinkage of cultivation, and in some places the appearance of peasant bands all indicated that peasants wanted to expand their economic freedom and political rights.”⁷⁷ The peasants were concerned that the Communists only made promises, while their own livelihoods and sheer survival were at stake. Nevertheless, by 1925-28 there were some signs of agricultural recovery, and in a few areas the output reached pre-war levels.

“Lack of culture, drunkenness, bureaucratisation, and detachment from the masses, these were the officially recognised and widespread social ills of the Communist Party,” and this economic and political situation dominated the Russian scene, but Stalin was ardent in his attempt to solidify the social base and gain their support.⁷⁸ The various social and political trends in the 1920s are often seen in the light of what happened before and after the NEP, but they cannot be disassociated from the rise of Stalin.

The literacy rates amongst the population rose exponentially with each year, and schools were established not just in towns but even in the remote areas. Stalin had never liked middle-class expertise, and he was hoping to generate Communist citizens who could rise to the occasion. Sporting facilities were organised, cinemas were built, the telephone exchange enlarged, trams, buses and lorries appeared, and in 1935 the first part of the Moscow underground was built. This was often seen as part of the great Cultural Revolution. There were few cars and those produced were purchased by institutions. On one occasion Stalin with some family members and cohorts visited the underground, but he was mobbed by crowds and soon returned to the safety of his office.

Despite these improvements there was degree of uneasy opposition mainly because of hunger and some outbreaks of violence. A one-time member of the Central Committee called Martemyan Ryutin was arrested in 1932 because he organised a small group of Communists to protest at Stalin’s despotic style of leadership. Stalin called for his execution, but the Politburo gave him ten years in the Gulag camps.* Men like Bukharin and many others would have watched with curiosity what happened to those who opposed Stalin; as it was Bukharin became chief editor of *Izvestia*.

* Solzhenitsyn who had been an officer in the Red Army until February 1945 was sentenced to the Gulags and later explained their life-style in the camps better than most.

Stalin was frequently referred to as “the boss” and people had become wary of his ways. When his wife Nadezhda was rumoured to have argued with him following a social occasion in late 1932, she then went outside and allegedly shot herself. According to a British diplomat working in Russia at the time the gossip was that Stalin’s wife was against the oppression in the countryside, and Stalin had ordered her arrest: the truth of these events will probably never be known; it could have been a mere domestic fight.⁷⁹ However, the Russian historian Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko related in detail how Yenukidze had been the first to find Stalin’s wife “with the marks of the killer’s fingers still on her throat.”⁸⁰ Yenukidze was himself later killed but this sounds like a possible scenario.* Later Yezhov investigated Yenukidze and a terrorist cell was uncovered but “Stalin had surely not forgotten that Yenukidze had ‘swayed’ Nadya politically, and had been the first to see the body.”⁸¹ The Spanish dictator Franco always looked after family, even his recalcitrant brother; Stalin was made of sterner stuff and never concerned himself over his own family. Stalin’s daughter always denied that her father killed her mother though she was only a child at the time, and the facts were often withheld from her, but she noted her mother’s picture retained a prominent place in Stalin’s rooms.[†]

Stalin was an unpleasant and dangerous man, who has been described as having a “maladjusted character, whose mistrustfulness was close to paranoia,” and his rise to power did not bode well for his critics, whether past or present.⁸² He had all the indications of the dictator including the need for adulation and always manipulated the way he was presented to the public. In 1925 Tsaritsyn had been renamed Stalingrad, and he liked to be known as the “man of steel.” People were soon frightened of him, wary, and some quietly opposed his leadership, but he also had his supporters many of whom thought the country was showing signs of marked progress. He later suppressed any opposition even if he had little reason, arresting some three thousand Red Army commanders who had once been in the Imperial Army. “As Russia entered the 1930s, everyone had to accept the official myth that the country was approaching socialism, and everyone loved Comrade

* Avel **Yenukidze** (Enukidze) (1877-1937) published Lenin’s revolutionary Theses during Tsarist times and was accused of diminishing Stalin’s literary contributions. In July 1935 he suggested to Stalin that he relinquish power. Stalin expelled him and two years later he was shot in the purges.

† “Some say my mother was a saint, others that she was mentally unbalanced. Neither of these things is true, any more than the story that she was murdered.” See Alliluyeva Svetlana, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p.83

Stalin, the greatest leader of all mankind. The GPU was to force people to act as if they believed that official representations were a reality.”⁸³

It was in these early 1930s or late 1920s that Stalin’s attention was drawn to the Georgian Lavrenty Beria now the local GPU chief in Tbilisi, for the sole reason that Beria had proved ruthlessly effective in crushing Georgian nationalism and the Kulaks.* He could see a man formed in his own image. The brutality in the Ukraine was especially appalling, and it has been claimed by some that the results of Stalin’s collectivisation was not that dissimilar to Hitler’s Holocaust, although the subjects and reasons were different. One Russian historian wrote that “Stalin’s holocaust, from his collectivization pogrom against the peasantry in 1929-33 through the relentless terror until his death in 1953,” meant “no one has yet managed to calculate the exact number of deaths.”⁸⁴ Armed squads moved from village to village with borders closed in order that the potential enemy could be eliminated. In the same ruthless style, the persecution of religion continued, and thousands of priests were hunted down and killed. There may have been progress on the literacy front and in education, but the Soviet Union was in many ways unstable, unhappy, and most people remained impoverished.

* It used to be called Tiflis but reverted to its Georgian name of Tbilisi.

CHAPTER SIX

PURGES AND TERROR, 1934-1938

A British diplomat on arriving in Moscow in November 1930 gained the impression that “Moscow was a city run to seed. The pavements all need repair; here and there are great holes full, at the moment, of water. The roadways are all cobbled...the shop windows are usually dirty and often broken, and the fronts of all the buildings are shabby and dilapidated.”⁸⁵ Another British visitor was Lady Astor in December 1931 who had the courage to ask Stalin how long he would keep killing people. Once the terrified interpreter was instructed to translate Stalin replied, “the process would continue as long as was necessary to establish Communist society.”⁸⁶

More to the point the 1930s in Russia was a time fraught with political and personal tension. It has been a very tempting theme to compare Stalin and Hitler as two sides of the same coin, which contains many fundamental truths. One difference, however, is that Hitler used capitalism in a state form, but Stalin virtually obliterated the capitalist market. Their ideologies were different; Stalin inherited a doctrine of human liberation (even though he perverted it), whereas Hitler’s ideology was one of racial superiority which resulted in the destruction of people on ethnic grounds, nationality and physical handicap; this was only part of Hitler’s doctrine. The launching of the 1939-45 war was also a measure of Nazi doctrine, but ideology can affect collective motivations and “sadly for historians, facile deductions from individual and or even collective motivations cannot explain fully where human actions might end up.”⁸⁷ They had different ideologies but the results for ordinary people had much in common as will be noted in Part Four.

The 1930s has a special place in Soviet history for many reasons. The first was the fact that the country had yet to recover from the devastating effects of the Great War followed by the Civil Wars. Secondly the NEP policy had helped but insufficiently, and finally because of these major factors there were a series of major upheavals. Stalin was at the centre of these issues and his personality and motives are still debated to this day. A very few regarded him as a benevolent leader doing his best under appalling

and complex situations. On the other hand, many depict a cold, manipulative tactician, and “others depict a control freak, distrusting everyone and everything, an irate, vindictive monster...a capricious madman who believed the massacres he committed were his greatest political invention.”⁸⁸ During the 1930s his reputation grew as a person who created fear if not terror. In the early years of the Revolution and Civil Wars Stalin was different from men like Lenin and Trotsky. They were more intellectual, better political analysts, they had lived in the West, whereas Stalin’s authoritarian nature had developed during the Civil Wars because of the free rein he had been given.



Stalin Signing Orders

However, during the late 1920s and early 1930s Stalin needed to assert his position and rid himself of those who had appreciated leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky. In his testament Lenin had made it clear that Stalin should be removed from his post and had called him a Russian bully, and Stalin knew that others were aware of this condemnation. “The need to furnish himself with a new historical alibi was doubtless among the reasons that impelled Stalin to launch the purges of party cadres,” he had long been contemplating; “he needed to erase a whole historical period and rid himself of those who had witnessed it and who knew who had done what in those heroic years.”⁸⁹

Stalin was ensuring he was viewed as a major founding figure of the new era, and the NKVD was therefore elevated above other institutions, and incorporated into the Party structure as his own guard and crusader. The reign of terror which characterised these years “had three interrelated sides. The first was aimed mainly at political opponents, the second focused more broadly on social opposition, above all the kulaks, and the third pursued

ethnic groups that might threaten inner security in the event of war.”⁹⁰ In this alone there appears a distinctive comparison with Hitler. This action of rectification as Stalin would have called it, involved politics, economics and unquestionably Stalin’s paranoid attitudes towards any person of whom he had the slightest suspicion. “Those who showed the slightest sign of independence or autonomy were punished, sometimes with banishment, often with worse.”⁹¹ He created a state of terror because “the theatre of terror generates visceral fears of anarchy, making people feel as if the social order is about to collapse,” thereby making Stalin essential for overall security.⁹² Stalin held great powers in his hands and like other tyrants used it to his own ends, but justified it as an act of leadership.

This was the start of the infamous Purges, and as Solzhenitsyn pertinently observed: “we have been assured and keep falling for it that during 1937 and 1938 the arrests consisted chiefly of the big Communists—and virtually no one else. But out of the millions arrested at this time, important Party and state officials could not possibly have represented more than ten percent;” the victims were mainly lower class.⁹³ Although in this text various numbers are quoted from various authorities Solzhenitsyn also warned that “as for the executions of 1937-1938, what legal expert, what criminal historian, will provide us with verified statistics?”⁹⁴ A point well worth noting.

The other weakness developing during this period remained the issue of economics. This was critical in the agrarian policy of collectivisation, which was fundamentally an act of robbery by the state as the peasants lost everything, and it remained a vague and contentious area for years to come. It led to a deep resentment if not hatred and spurred on the rising problem of crime, which too often was inspired by the need for sheer survival. Therefore, the State under Stalin, decided all forms of crime were designated as politically motivated. Stalin was feared and there existed a passive conformity because of Stalin’s repressive power. He encouraged gathering support from among his younger appointees, the privileged and the new social-class he was intent on building. Stalin extended the power of the state over society and developed a new Soviet culture with its own view of the world, namely his view.

Nevertheless, there were deep grumblings, not just from the repressed peasantry, but growing doubts within some political and intellectual groups. There has been considerable debate over the motivation behind the purges, ranging from political infighting to arguing that it was critical for totalitarianism to avoid elections. There was always the simple possibility that Stalin had become a tyrant, and this was his way of retaining or entrenching his power. Later Khrushchev was to write: “All of us around

Stalin were temporary people.* As long as he trusted us to a certain degree, we were allowed to go on living and working. But the minute he stopped trusting you, Stalin would start to scrutinise you until the cup of his distrust overflowed.”⁹⁵

By 1933 nearly a million Soviet citizens were interned or working inside the forced labour camps; in addition to these appalling figures the years 1934 to 1938 saw a rise in the reign of terror. Much of this was brought about by the personality of Stalin who was suspicious of everyone (he once said he was even suspicious of himself) to the point of paranoia and portrayed all the features of other would-be dictators of eliminating the slightest opposition. He demanded total subservience to his leadership, and a total control over Soviet society and economics. Stalin had a paranoid disposition which his daughter often blamed on Beria, but at this stage Beria was far from the scene in Georgia acting as his puppet. Stalin destroyed some of his oldest friends and even some family members. According to his daughter such men as Ordzhonikidze “were very close to my father” and “Bukharin whom everyone adored, often came for the summer” but they were killed at Stalin’s command.⁹⁶ Stalin appeared to have no emotional attachment or if he did it was ignored in his pursuit of total power, as his daughter observed, “it was very like my father to wash his hands of the members of his own family, to wipe them out of his mind and act as if they didn’t exist.”⁹⁷ Stalin had already used the OGPU to weed out party members whom he regarded as a threat, using repression on the grounds of social defence. He was not yet the total dictator as there were still the power bases of the All-Union Communist Party, the People’s Commissariats and the OGPU, all coming into being and prominence during the first five-year plan. However, despite other power-bases the fact was that everyone who made up such bodies were utterly terrified of falling foul of Stalin. In that sense he was already the absolute dictator.

In 1933 nearly a million party membership cards had been withdrawn on the slightest excuse in case they were oppositionists, but such was the sprawling nature of governance and its many and varied tentacles Stalin could never be certain he had total support, and therefore his suspicions ranged widely, and for most somewhat disconcertingly. “The available data indicates that between 1922 and 1935 approximately one and half million

* **Nikita Khrushchëv** (1894-1971) was to become the well-known Soviet leader during the Cold War, as First Secretary of the Communist Party and later Chairman (1952-1964). He supported Stalin’s purges and was sent to the Ukraine to continue them. He was at the Battle of Stalingrad and later adviser to Stalin in Moscow. Unusually at his downfall he was only pensioned off and his memoirs were smuggled to the West.

members left the party, mostly by failing to pay dues and thereby letting their membership lapse.”⁹⁸ Many more were excluded on what has sometimes been called the pre-purges. The first warning bells were sounded by Stalin at the Seventeenth Congress in February 1934 (sometimes dubbed the Congress of Victors) when he warned against complacency in economic growth, and against *any form of indulgence against former opportunists*. In the Party elections Stalin did not gather the expected number of votes, and he lost the title of General Secretary and became simply Secretary, but he remained very much in total control.

Although the OGPU lost its status as an independent organisation in 1934 when its employees and their activities came under the control of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), this did not change their powers, but rather centralised them and provoked a sense of fear much deeper and more widespread. After Kirov (who had been viewed as an alternative to Stalin during the February Congress) was allegedly shot in his office Stalin used this incident (which he may possibly have manipulated from his usual distance) to grant more authority to the NKVD to arrest and execute at will.* Some reliable historians are convinced, with a possibility of truth, that Kirov’s death was organised by the NKVD or at least originated from Stalin. Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko’s history gives carefully noted evidence to this effect.⁹⁹ In her biography of Beria Amy Knight also provides some insights into Beria’s possible involvement, including Beria’s sudden visit to Moscow to meet Yagoda the then NKVD chief, and Kirov’s closest friend Ordzhonikidze who was taken mysteriously ill after visiting Beria and ordered to stay in Georgia by Stalin as he recovered; it was then Kirov was killed.^{100/†} However, it remains a mystery as there is no conclusive evidence one way or the other, but this speculation seems more than possible, because Beria had “truly brought the venom of the Borgias to the court of the Bolsheviks.”¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the historian Burleigh wrote that the “fortuitous assassination of the Leningrad boss Sergei Kirov was by a jealous husband,” called Nikolaev who died in a fatal accident while in custody.¹⁰² Kirov was a well-known womaniser and had an affair

* **Sergei Kirov** (1886-1934) was a prominent Bolshevik leader and part of the 1905 revolt which led to his arrest. He was a supporter of industrialisation and collectivism, and at the 17th Congress supported Stalin. It is generally believed that Stalin had him killed. He was laid to rest in the Kremlin Wall and Stalin helped carry his coffin.

† **Genrikh Yagoda** (1891-1938) was a secret police official who served as director of the NKVD 1934-36. He was demoted in favour of Yezhov, was arrested in 1937 and stood in the last of the Terror Trials and executed. His sentence was not later annulled, nor was his reputation rehabilitated.

with a Milda Draule who was Nikolaev's estranged wife. This version is strongly backed by Sudoplatov in his memoirs and seems a more likely version. The facts are difficult to ascertain with any certainty, surviving documents are not trustworthy, and even personal reminiscences must be treated critically even if, as with Sudoplatov, they contained evident grains of truth. Sudoplatov's memoirs appear to be reliable because although he was critical of the past, he was not in a state of denial or offering a self-defence when he wrote them. The various possibilities relating to Kirov's death are outlined here to demonstrate the difficulty of ascertaining the truth of events in the assorted versions of Soviet history.

Nevertheless, Stalin used Kirov's death to his advantage, pretending there was a secret rebellion, and it also "diverted public opinion from the worsening economic and political cries."¹⁰³ Stalin turned his vindictive attack on Kamenev and Zinoviev whom he accused of being involved in Kirov's death.* They were sentenced in the first instance to ten years in prison and many of their supporters were sent to Siberia. In 1936 they were re-accused of terrorist activities in line with Trotsky and were given promises that if they confessed, they would be returned to their cells. Their case was heard in open court, and they were found guilty and shot the next day. Stalin gave the orders and the NKVD "issued Order 00486 calling for the arrest of all traitors and others condemned by the military tribunals."¹⁰⁴ They landed up in special camps and this conduct remained a characteristic of Stalin's rule.

It was as if Stalin were organising a prophylactic defence against those who might oppose him or who remembered too much of his past. As noted, thousands of Party members had had their cards removed as part of this exercise, which had initiated the infamous purges. The accusations proliferated and anyone who had the slightest connection with Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev were accused of spying. Stalin's closest associates at this time were Molotov, Kaganovich and Zhdanov, and even these cohorts dared not question Stalin.[†] The Politburo's meetings diminished, and Stalin was rapidly becoming the dominant leadership figure, but not yet

* Later in the 1936-8 trials Trotsky was incriminated *in absentia* for the Kirov assassination.

[†] **Andrei Zhdanov** (1896-1948) held a variety of posts. He was Second Secretary of the Communist Party ((1939-48), Chairman of the Soviet Union (1946-47) and in 1939 made Head of Propaganda and Agitation. In 1946 he was head of the Soviet Union's cultural policy when it was said he reduced "culture to a chart." For a time, he was regarded as Stalin's successor, but he was such an alcoholic that even Stalin told him to stop drinking. He died from ill-health.

the total dictator in name. Using Trotsky's name as a guide Stalin started to suspect conspiracies in every department and organ of government.

Even members of the Central Committee were not safe from denunciation, and Stalin turned his attention to the Red Army leaders to ensure there could be no opposition from that quarter. As he did so he also denounced Bukharin, Tomksi and Rykov as guilty of espionage.* The Politburo pressurised by Stalin passed a resolution *On Anti-Soviet Elements*, and torture was permitted as a normal procedure during interrogation. The NKVD, then under the control of Yezhov, had massive and terrifying powers at their disposal.† Yezhov was used whenever there was the slightest disturbance as occurred in the Krasnoyarsk region over an accidental grain store fire, Stalin promptly ordered immediate executions. "His method was systematically arbitrary; for the Politburo decision of July 1937 [mentioned above] assigned arrest-quotas to each main territorial unit of the USSR."¹⁰⁵

The victims were frequently tried by a procedure called Trios (*Troiki*) which simply consisted of the local NKVD chief, a party secretary and procurator; the so-called trials were brief, there was no right of appeal, and executions were often carried out within a half an hour of the sentence. The policy was simple; it removed the slightest opposition and thus invoked a sense of fear amongst survivors. As noted by Solzhenitsyn the figures for those who died will never be known for certain, but it has been estimated that over a million and perhaps two million were killed by execution or overwork in the prison camps. As Hitler's trains were to travel to the concentration camps Stalin's trains travelled by night carrying the victims to the various Gulag camps. All too often the so-called culprit was killed and his family, including children, and other supporters were sent to the camps. Again, it can only be speculation, but probably millions of people found themselves in this predicament. During this period of terror Yezhov

* **Mikhail Tomski** (1880-1936) was a factory worker, Trade Union leader and committed Bolshevik. He was a member of the Central Committee as early as 1919 but Stalin forced his resignation in 1929. He oversaw Soviet Chemical Industries and then from 1932 to 1936 led the State Publishing House. To avoid being taken by the NKVD he committed suicide in 1936.

Alexei Rykov (1881-1938) joined the Bolsheviks in 1903 and took part in the 1905 Revolt. In 1917 he was a member of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. He was regarded as a potential successor to Lenin and Sovnarkom elected him as Deputy Chairman in 1923. In 1930 he was removed from the Politburo, and from 1931-37 he was the People's Commissar for Communications. He died in March 1938 as part of the purges. The verdict was annulled in 1988.

† **Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov** (1895-1940) headed the NKVD from 1936 to 1938 during these purges. Using a play on his Russian name he was nicknamed the Iron Hedgehog. He fell from grace with Stalin and was condemned and executed in 1940.

(NKVD) took into custody tens of thousands of Red Army personnel including fifteen out of sixteen army commanders, which would have serious ramifications in the approaching war years. Years later Sudoplatov tried to make sense of Stalin's reaction against his own military men. The first was the belief they had been compromised by German and Czechoslovakian disinformation which was unlikely. The second alleged that the victims were regarded as the intellectual superiors of Voroshilov who had argued against him, and thereby Stalin. Related to this was the third possibility, which was epitomised by Stalin's deep suspicion of General Tukhachevsky who had the nerve to quarrel with Stalin in the failure of the battle against the Poles in 1920. This third reason probably had some substance. Sudoplatov noted that Beria had seized on some paperwork and underlined that "the fall of Tukhachevsky decisively shows that Stalin tightly controls the Red Army," before it landed on Stalin's desk.¹⁰⁶ As Beria knew this would please Stalin.* It also suited Stalin and Beria to continue the theme of "a plot" rather than admit it was a tussle for supreme power.

Stalin lost some of his best potential commanders just as the Second World War was looming; "with the like of Tukhachevsky, Blucher and Yegorov, the tragedy of 22nd June 1941 could have been avoided."¹⁰⁷ As a result of the purges the state of the Russian air force was in a dire position as the war years approached. Stalin managed to liquidate three of his five Soviet Marshals and three of his four Fleet Commanders. "Stalin had [also] shattered his own remarkable spy network: of the 450 secret police officials stationed abroad, at least 275 had been arrested by his regime."¹⁰⁸ Later in 1957 it was said that "it was thought the Beria clique had picked up a giant crystal vase containing 82,000 of the best, most experienced, and qualified commanders and political workers in the army and navy and smashed it on the rocks. On the eve of the war we found ourselves decapitated."¹⁰⁹ These activities later included whole swathes of population with Poles deposited in Kazakhstan, Kurds driven out from their homelands, and Koreans ousted from eastern Siberia.

All these appalling machinations were intended to solidify the power of the State, yet the violence was so disproportionate along with the general terror that the carnage often had the reverse effect. "Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, quipped that if he had not died in 1924, he would be serving time in one of Stalin's prisons."¹¹⁰ The NKVD had become the epitome for this rule of terror, and pertinent to this study appeared Yezhov's new Deputy

* The German chief of Hitler's foreign intelligence later wrote that the Germans had deliberately fabricated documents pointing to Tukhachevsky as their agent; see Schellenberg Walter, *The Labyrinth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956)

Lavrenty Beria, who arrived in Moscow in July 1938. He kept a variety of canes in his office from which he became notorious for his personal beatings of men brought before him; like many other NKVD men he was a hideous sadist and enjoyed taking a role in the actual torture.

Stalin also attacked his own people in other countries, and in 1938 he unbelievably eliminated the leading figures of the Polish Communist party; his sole reason was probably to repress any form of insubordination or independent thinking. Stalin would not tolerate any opposition whether it was perceived in his paranoid mind or had the vaguest tinge of truth. Trotsky, hidden in an armed compound in Mexico, was killed with the infamous ice-axe incident on the 20th August 1940, and even the NKVD chief Yezhov came under suspicion, (as had his predecessor) and was executed in February 1940. It was Beria through his trusted henchman Sudoplatov who successfully organised Trotsky's death.

Yezhov, the henchman of the purge was personally vulnerable, and the terror may have superficially diminished in 1938, but the threat never left while Stalin lived because of his sadistic servants such as Beria and Yezhov. Yezhov was known as the bloodthirsty dwarf because "he was only about five-foot tall, joined the Party in March 1917. Stalin had discovered him in a provincial post and brought him into the Secretariat. He became a member of the Central Committee in 1927. An old Communist remarked 'In the whole of my life I have never seen a more repellent personality than Yezhov's.'"¹¹¹ Sudoplatov on first meeting Yezhov wrote "I was shocked by his unimpressive appearance...he asked incompetent questions about elementary matters of intelligence tradecraft. He didn't know basic techniques of working with a source of information."¹¹² It was clear that Yezhov was cunning, cruel, and incompetent which would have made him an easy prey for Beria. However, when Sudoplatov first met Beria, he was impressed by Beria's knowledge of tradecraft and sabotage.¹¹³

It was at this stage that Beria took Yezhov's place and became close to Stalin. Stalin had elevated himself above the Party and all other power organisations; it was now a totally authoritarian state, but the trauma of these years had been extensive, and left a deep scar on Russian history. After the Second World War men like Molotov and Kaganovich tried to excuse the purges making the ridiculous claim that during the war there were no enemies behind the lines.¹¹⁴

The number of people killed in the purges will never be known for sure, but the historian Robert Conquest estimated through his study of available evidence that between 1937 and 1938 that the numbers were within this region: "Arrests 1937-1938 about seven million, executed about one million, died in camps, about two million, in prison, late 1938 about one

million, in camps, late 1938 (assuming five million in camps at the end of 1936) about eight million. I also concluded, from much Soviet and other testimony, that not more than ten per cent of those in camp survived.”¹¹⁵ The figures are simply mind-boggling.

Perhaps the best way to underline the feeling of terror is to conclude this chapter with a paragraph from Vasily Grossman’s highly acclaimed novel: “One night before the war, Krymov had walked past the Lubyanka [prison and HQs of NKVD/KGNB in downtown Moscow] and tried to guess what was going on inside that sleepless building.* After being arrested, people would be kept there for eight months, a year, a year and a half, until the investigation had been completed. Their relatives would then receive letters from camps and see the words Komi, Salekhard, Norilsk, Kotlas, Magadan, Vorkuta, Kolyma, Kuznetsk, Krasnoyarsk, Karaganda, Bukhta Nagaev... but many thousands would disappear for ever after their spell in the Lubyanka.”¹¹⁶

* The Lubyanka or Dom Dva (House No 2) had once been the office of the Russia Insurance Company.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIFE IN THE USSR

As in Germany so in Russia the citizen was under the total control of a dictator but ruling under a different ideology. No form of opposition was allowed, and total compliance was required in all aspects of everyday life. During the Great Terror Stalin's power had increased exponentially, but he did not hold absolute power, and knew that with the sheer vastness of country and population, he always had to somehow be seemingly identified with the wishes of the people. He had virtually eliminated the Bolshevik comrades of old days and replaced them with the new elite, his own product and people. Some of these men were to survive Stalin and govern later, men such as Brezhnev, Podgorny and Kosygin.* These men had not been part of the October Revolution, but they had been created and selected by Stalin's wishes and propaganda, and Stalin had been the main influence in their elevation.

A new class was emerging in Russia of an elite bureaucratic type which replaced the old class structures. This group survived because they followed Stalin's doctrines and demands without equivocation. Stalin recognised this and frequently referred to the destruction of the bourgeoisie by a new social and economic order. The very word Bourgeois was all but a swearword, a well-known publicist called Iablonovskii had written "Bourgeois. It seems that this word, with its abusive meaning, occupies a position between 'scoundrel' and 'swine,' and its wide usage is explained, apparently by its polemical convenience."¹¹⁷ It had become a political label not just for the Bolsheviks; even Kerensky had attacked those bearing this description. In Russia, it was now claimed there were only the working-classes, the

* **Leonid Brezhnev** (1906-1982) was to follow Khrushchëv as General Secretary assisted by Podgorny and Kosygin, and governed Russia during the 1960s and 1970s. Brezhnev started his career in the Komsomol groups and at the end of the War (where he had mainly been a Political Commissar) he was a Major-General. He met Stalin in 1952 and was appointed to the Central Committee. **Podgorny** and **Kosygin** were of the same kind of background and were products of that age rather than pertinent to this period now under examination.

peasantry, and the “working intelligentsia” who were the administrators and management at all levels. The Communist manifesto explained that in modern times “society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great camps, into great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.”¹¹⁸ There was supposed to be no class warfare because these three groups all had the same ideals, encapsulated within the state. The new state and its constitution became idealised and projected as true Communism, which was purportedly for the benefit of all.

Most Russians were not taken in by this propaganda, but some foreigners were, not least Sidney and Beatrice Webb who following a visit to Russia, tried to explain that Russia was not a dictatorship.* It was easy to manipulate visitors who were not constantly living in Russia, and when the Webbs spent time with a British diplomat he noted in his diary, “it is evident that on the whole they have seen what everyone sees, the show pieces, and I think they have been too prone to accept at their face value such statements.”¹¹⁹ The current writer of this exploration visited Russia as a Komsomol guest during the Brezhnev period and experienced the same style of show-propaganda. “The Soviet propaganda machine was so efficient, that it managed to hide monstrous atrocities at home while projecting a utopian vision abroad,” and it managed this for decades.¹²⁰

True Marxism referred to the withering away of the State, but Stalin’s version of the State was all powerful and central to his policy; it had reached the condition of a terror-state.† To manage this enterprise Stalin had surrounded himself with his own network of supporters with men such as Molotov, Kaganovich and Mikoyan, and then brought in his own home-grown products such as Khrushchev, Malenkov and Beria, all of whom he chose and promoted from the lower regions of power.‡ “The central

* The Webbs wrote an apologia called *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*

† “The ideas of Karl Marx were known to Russian intellectuals already in the 1870s,” but Lenin and especially Stalin only used Marx for justification: Seton-Watson Hugh, *The Russian Empire 1801-1971* (Oxford: OUP, 1967) p.550

‡ **Anastas Mikoyan** (1895-1978) was a Soviet Armenian revolutionary who served under Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. He was a strong supporter of Stalin until Stalin turned against him in his final years. Later he made key-trips to Cuba and the USA. He was the only Soviet politician who managed to stay near the top for a long time and was sometimes known as the “Vicar of Bray of politics” because he was a survivor. He died in 1978 from old age and was buried in Novodevichy cemetery.

Georgy Malenkov (1902-1988) succeeded Stalin as premier of Soviet Union (1953-56). He had been heavily involved in Stalin’s purges; he later ran the Rocket Research and gained favour with Stalin by trying to discredit Zhukov. He took over from Stalin but for a mere nine days, and he failed in a coup against Khrushchev in

leadership was like a gang, and Stalin as its leader relied upon his fellow members to organise the state's institution."¹²¹ They were all on the surface great friends, and as one historian put it Khrushchev "as it turned out, was best buddies with Beria."¹²² Total obedience was the necessary requisite for such men because the alternative was death. The simple fact was that the closer the proximity to Stalin's throne the more dangerous life became. Even his closest cohorts could never safely object to Stalin's views or policies. Survival against Stalin demanded a variety of approaches and techniques. Mikoyan avoided any intrigue, and concentrated on his tasks, he was an intelligent man and "he knew how to play the game and do just enough."¹²³ Malenkov sometimes known as the killer bureaucrat, once estimated to have killed some 150,000 people, played his part with total cooperation, and Beria did everything it took to pander to his lord and master.

After the terror in the late 1930s they lived in slightly better circumstances because Stalin needed them for his long-term purposes and survival. These men ensured that Stalin's back was covered, so when Beria later replaced Yezhov his first task was to rid the NKVD of Yezhov's men and replace them with his own. This served Beria's purpose and that of Stalin. At this and every level the skills of survival had to be developed by his cohorts and their servants.

This need for survival existed on all the rungs of the political ladder, and frequently led to corruption as figures were often changed or fiddled to ensure that targets were apparently met. This ensured a *possible pat on the back* with awards and survival. It also created a sense of nervous tension especially for those holding positions of power up and down the offices of the administration. In the rest of society denunciations were common, targets had to be met, poor workmanship reported, absenteeism, and ill-discipline could all lead to prison. Letter writing of failures was not discouraged, and people in minor positions were always obliged to be alert; it had become the world of George Orwell's big brother. This was also replicated in agricultural areas, and there occurred the infamous case of a young boy called Pavlik (Pavel) Morozov, who denounced his father and was lynched by the village for so doing: "New generations of Young Pioneers were trained with Pavel Morozov as their model."¹²⁴ In the higher reaches of Soviet society men enjoyed their dachas and commodities, but had to be equally wary of what was happening around their areas of interest. The French scholar Emmanuel Todd correctly noted that the Soviet Union

1957. He was exiled to Kazakhstan returning to Moscow where he kept a low profile and converted to the Orthodox faith.

could be regarded as a feudal society with a new caste deriving benefits from the economic rather than hereditary rights.¹²⁵

Sports clubs, recreation groups and any form of gathering had to have the sanction of the state and “citizens were to act collectively only when mobilised by the party,” because “the plan was to maximise the influence over people as individuals.”¹²⁶ People were even told to brush their teeth, beards were discouraged, and they were instructed to care for themselves hygienically. For many people life had improved in terms of education and general facilities, but Stalin was feared by most and not always liked, especially in the rural areas. Food supplies had improved but were dull, and that aspect probably summarised life for many in the USSR.

There was for the everyday citizen a new identity emerging which was “best sought in mass culture, produced for the people by the state-controlled media.”¹²⁷ However, under the State control, personal or popular taste was all too often dictated by political considerations. During the period of the so-called Cultural Revolution power was centralised in a rapidly developing hierarchical society, in which ordinary citizens were deprived of many natural rights. Nevertheless, for the Communist leaders the degree of social stability during the 1930s was not dependent on prosperity, but it tended to rest on the need to rethink Soviet national identity.

Among the many policies the Bolsheviks “systematically suppressed competing scenarios of historical change propounded by non-Bolshevik members of the intelligentsia” and this line of thinking was promoted.¹²⁸ In the general teaching the doctrine of history was reviewed. After the revolution the Communist Manifesto had instructed that proletarians had no “motherland,” and the word patriotism was supposed to disappear from the national vocabulary. The idea of motherland and nationalistic expansion was referred to as chauvinism; Russian history was all but discontinued.

However, during 1934 a new policy was initiated and was often dubbed “the great retreat:” it attempted to transform “Russia into a country with much more fervent nationalism than she had before the attempt of international transfiguration.”¹²⁹ It started by making any form of supposed treason against the nation a capital offence, and then resurrected patriotic figures from the past. Peter the Great, Alexander Nevsky (victor over the Swedes and Germans), and other great generals with countless others were added to the neo-communist pantheon mainly picked at random. Not all leaders agreed with this and Bukharin, then editor of *Izvestia* had demonstrated a voice of criticism, but the paper *Pravda* was supportive. It was regarded as a re-discovery of Russia’s past along with aspects of its cultural history. This policy was all on time for the 1939-45 war, and for

those with this mind-set in the new interpretation of national history, it justified the annexation of eastern Poland.

Stalin's welfare state may have been appreciated but not Stalin. He had organised a state with orderly features, but the old problem of geographical size meant in places it was chaotic, existence was better for some, but dull and grim for most, and life was still cheap.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORLD WAR II, MILITARY AND POLITICAL

By the late 1930s Europe was on the brink of war. Stalin had often quoted Lenin that economics would drive capitalists against each other, but he also pointed out to the Central Committee the need for the USSR to avoid becoming involved in such conflicts. Nevertheless, he built up his armed forces and military supplies, and fought a battle against the Japanese in 1938 at Lake Khasan, also known as the Changkufeng incident in China and Japan. The Japanese incursion into Mongolia brought to light the soon to be famous Russian Zhukov who used tanks for the first time in Russian military history, and a truce was agreed in September 1939; it was generally believed that the Russians had the better advantage in this conflict. However, the more serious and ominous conflict was emerging in the West where it was widely understood that Hitler was looking towards the east and Poland. At first Stalin turned his attention to France and Britain for some security, but both countries appeared reluctant, especially Britain whose reticence indicated to Stalin that they wanted nothing to do with the pariah state he controlled. The French and especially the British were tardy because this auction of political power suddenly appeared to favour Stalin. In the end Stalin abandoned Litvinov his Foreign Minister and turned to Molotov who helped engineer the well-known Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Treaty.* Only the non-aggression section was made public, but it contained secret protocols which divided Eastern Europe into areas of influence, with Russia looking to East Poland and the Northern Baltic area when it was

* **Maxim Litvinov** (1876-1951) was ethnically a Jewish Russian and married to an English woman. He wanted diplomatic relationships rather than war and assisted in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928; he was famous for the Litvinov Protocol in trying to make sure this Pact was part of Soviet Union thinking. In 1930 he was appointed People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, but he was sacked in 1939 after he failed to convince Britain and France into a treaty against Hitler and was then made Ambassador to the USA. His car was hit by a truck in 1951 (possibly arranged by Stalin) and he died from injuries. His wife returned to England in 1972.

signed.* In 1918 the new Polish Republic had taken Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, and when Russia invaded as part of this Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement these eastern borderlands were soon returned, and deportations and massacres followed with Stalin's use of Beria.

The German-Soviet pact was precisely what Hitler had needed for his incursion into Poland in the hope of avoiding a war on two fronts. In late September there was a further agreement on a *Boundary and Friendship Treaty* in which Lithuania was added to Stalin's area of influence, with a boundary agreed along the River Bug. The smaller Baltic States had little choice but to sign mutual assistance agreements with the USSR, which allowed Soviet military bases in their territory. It was on the surface an act of mutual protection, but these minor states were not fooled, and would always want their freedom. Andrei Zhdanov when in Estonia "candidly told a secret party gathering in Leningrad that Soviet policy was to take advantage of the war in order to expand."¹³⁰ Beria's agents were deeply involved, and he claimed it was necessary "in bringing down the current governments of the semi-puppet states that proclaimed so-called independence in 1918 under the patronage of German bayonets."¹³¹

Stalin constantly held to the delusion that Hitler could be trusted and suffered from this false impression until it was too late. At the end of 1939 Stalin invaded the small country of Finland where he met the well-known resistance of the Finns led by their competent leader Baron Carl Gustav Mannerheim. The Red Army lost some 200,000 lives against a determined Finnish resistance who knew how to utilise their own wintry landscape. Stalin always claimed he was not attacking Finland, but he was defending the democrats against a military fascist clique. When he sent his ultimatum to Finland, Stalin was dining with Beria in Khrushchev's apartments. The Finnish war did not go well, and at one time he had to ask Beria to arrange for his NKVD troops to man the rear of the Soviet lines to stop the desertion of the fleeing Soviet troops.¹³²

During this period when Hitler started his European conquest the Baltic States were obligated to become new Soviet republics, and in July 1940 Stalin took Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from Romania. This was accompanied with the usual brutality, and the NKVD under Beria organised population movements, with all the possible opposition instantly transported to the Gulag system of camps. They were often referred to as "special settlements," which provided the Soviet Union with free but brutalised

* The British spy Donald Maclean had allegedly sent information to the USSR about the reluctance of the British and French governments to work alongside the Soviets. See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.95

labour upon which the war-effort would soon depend. It was also at this time that the notorious massacre of Polish officers took place in Katyn, where thousands of men were shot and buried under Beria's NKVD command.* Appendix Two contains one of the banal letters of information from Beria to Stalin.

The French army collapsed, and the British had retreated behind the English Channel, but Stalin was convinced the Germans would not attack Russia. Stalin and his cohorts believed their military power was large enough to be a deterrent, and he ignored warnings from their own well-known spy Richard Sorge, as well as Churchill in London. "One recent Russian analysis provides a table of fifty-six intelligence reports from January to June 1941, each growing more specific."¹³³ Stalin still insisted on transporting Russian goods to Germany up to the time of the invasion; in 1940 alone some 52% of all Soviet exports went to Germany.

By mid-1941 Stalin remained convinced that the USSR was safe because the traditional Russian winter was only months away, and in the meantime the Russians were massively increasing their industrial military output. However, the Russian defences were ill-prepared, and their air-force planes were conveniently lined up for easy strafing by Göring's Luftwaffe under Kesselring when the attack started. Stalin was so shocked it was rumoured he had either had a nervous breakdown or had retreated to his dacha in the certain anticipation he was to be arrested. The possible truth behind this will be explored later in Part Two dealing with Beria. Barbarossa had "caught the Soviet government both strategically and psychologically ill-prepared," and it was Molotov who broadcast the news on Sunday June 22nd to a shocked public.¹³⁴ It was not until July 3rd that Stalin made a half-hour broadcast; he told his surprised listeners "I am addressing you as my friends!"¹³⁵ The truth of these early few days will never be known in detail, but Stalin was soon back working harder than he had ever done before to gain some grip on the situation.† This was not easy because the next few months witnessed the invasion of the Baltic States, Belorussia, and by

* Beria's son Sergo later claimed his father was against killing the Polish officers but not on grounds of human compassion but because they might be useful later. See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.296

† Solzhenitsyn commented on this speech having seen or heard of its reception in a village community when a peasant pointed to the loudspeaker and "made a rude gesture much favoured by Russians: one hand grips the opposite elbow, and the forearm rises and falls in a pumping motion." Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.341

September Hitler's troops in Operation *Typhoon* were close to seizing Moscow.

A State Committee of Defence was formed including Beria, Molotov, Malenkov, and Voroshilov (a former locksmith it is sometimes claimed) with Stalin as the chairman.* This was Stalin's usual *modus vivendi* of seeking men who would obey him without question, and, as the Russian historian Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko noted, he chose Beria the man who "had mastered the murderer's trade without needing to study. He represented the organs of criminal detection and punishment."¹³⁶

Ten days later (June 10th) Stalin was appointed Supreme Commander and Chairman of the High Command (*Stavka*); in short Stalin was again totally in charge. His first decision was whether to transfer the seat of government further east from the endangered Moscow, but Zhukov claimed the Germans would be held. Zhukov was right, and the Germans already badly overstretched in their supply lines were overwhelmed by the blast of the Russian winter. Stalin worked assiduously at his desk, leaving most public announcements to Molotov and barely went near the front, leaving his offices only for the conferences at Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945); he made one other trip near to the front line (but not too close) probably risking this for propaganda reasons.¹³⁷ During the initial crisis the Politburo worked in fragments with smaller meetings for specific purposes, and only according to Stalin's whim. He frequently held meetings at his dacha with his closest cohorts. "This is attested by Mikoyan, who explained that a quintet (Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria and Mikoyan) existed in the Politburo until 1941 dealing with foreign policy issues and operational matters."¹³⁸ It was a form of micro-management and was to become a characteristic of Stalin's rule.

As a war leader he developed a prodigious memory for detail, but as supreme commander made several appalling errors of judgement; this included allowing Kiev to be encircled, then Vyazna and Leningrad. He was not amenable to suggested changes to his own ruthless plans, and in 1941 he had ordered that Russian soldiers who were captured by the enemy would be branded traitors, and their families penalised through the ration card

* **Kliment Voroshilov** (1881-1969) was a prominent Soviet Military Officer and politician during Stalin's time. He was one of the original five Soviet Union Marshals. In his early days he had been a political commissar alongside Stalin, and never changed from the Party's rulings. After the War he looked after the Communist interests in Hungary, and in 1953 was approved as Chairman of the Presidium. As Khrushchev de-Stalinised Voroshilov faded from the national scene, but he was brought out of retirement by Brezhnev in 1966. He died a few years later in 1969 and was placed in the Kremlin Wall.

system. Stalin's definition of "traitor" defies belief and Solzhenitsyn had personal well-founded reasons to be bitter and cynical about the term traitor. Solzhenitsyn wrote "that spring of 1945 was, in our prisons, predominantly the spring of the Russian prisoners of war...not only war prisoners...a wave of those who had spent any time in Europe was rolling too; émigrés from the Civil war...workers recruited as labourers by the Germans...Red Army officers who had been too astute and farsighted in their conclusions."¹³⁹ He added the caustic insight that it was "their calculating Motherland who had betrayed them, not just once but *thrice*...on the battlefield through ineptitude...when abandoned to die in captivity...and coaxed them home to imprison them. Where did these millions of traitors come from?"¹⁴⁰ He noted that it had started early in the regime's history when in 1919, "suspicion of our Russians returning from abroad was already having its effect, (Why? What was their alleged assignment?)—thus the officers of the Russian expeditionary force in France were imprisoned on their homecoming."¹⁴¹ Solzhenitsyn observed that after the Second World War England hanged one traitor, Lord Haw-Haw, but the worse thing was to be Russian because after the "most righteous war in our history, to a country with a supremely just social order—and tens and hundreds of thousands stood revealed as traitors."¹⁴² This brief excursion into Solzhenitsyn's views is necessary to understand that the word "traitor" was for Stalin only an excuse for repression.

Commanders were also ordered not to retreat and consequently a General Pavlov was executed; he was to be the only execution at this level because the purges in the 1930s had done enough damage at senior command level. It took time, but Stalin soon realised he had to encourage as well as terrify his men. He also had to try and convince the Allies of his good faith and announced the dissolution of the Comintern (which advocated world communism) in May 1943, which "was also an attempt to shift attention away from the Katyn massacre" recently made public by the Germans.¹⁴³ It pleased the Americans who were generally fooled by Stalin's methods. The Katyn massacre had been an embarrassment when the Poles had made earlier enquiries. Molotov's chancery had responded that they had run off or had been unfortunately handed to the Germans, and the same excuse emanated from Beria's office who somehow found about four hundred Polish men to parade as some scanty form of proof.¹⁴⁴

Armament factories had been moved to the east of the Urals, and the Russian industrial war output rose dramatically, eventually producing twice the amount of material the Germans had managed, and twice the amount of men. Stalin, after his initial misreading of Hitler with his few days of hesitation, established his absolute dictatorship to new heights. The

“mobilisation of mammoth resources by draconic labour laws; the vastness of the country and the enormous size of its human resources; the ‘Napoleonic’ frost; the contribution of the Allies to the Soviet war effort and their stake in it, all these enmeshed into a formidable bulwark.”¹⁴⁵

The German disaster at Stalingrad, followed by the battle of Kursk demonstrated that the Russians were in the ascendancy, and although no one could be sure at this stage, to the more discerning it appeared that German military power had met its match. Underestimating the sheer size of the USSR and its potential industry and manpower had been Hitler’s major mistake.

As the Red Army moved into Poland the question of postwar organisation raised its head. Stalin was now looking to increase his influence beyond the old borders. This explained the Red Army’s refusal to assist the rising in Warsaw. There were clear indications that Stalin was already looking to the long-term future, and he turned his venom on the West for not being proactive enough in producing a Second Front. He had received help from the USA and Britain, mainly food, jeeps and lorries which had not been part of his industrial plans. Stalin’s future intentions became critical, if not the main subject of his meetings with the Western Allies, with whom he had a testy relationship. Stalin hated his nickname of Uncle Joe, tried to woo Roosevelt away from Churchill, but he was startled when Churchill walked out on hearing of his plans to annihilate 50,000 German officers.

It was Churchill who did an arithmetical carve up of areas of influence when it became apparent that Stalin would keep Poland in his hegemony, the very country over which Britain and France had gone to war. It was a curious manipulative design by the British Prime Minister and is somewhat ill-defined in its reality, which was once described as the “central indiscretion of the talks.”¹⁴⁶ These zones “of influence” would establish the outline of what would soon be dubbed the Cold War. This left only the question of Japan where the war continued with bitter fighting. The Russians agreed to enter the conflict when ready, but the development of the atom bomb made this less necessary, but Stalin ensured he was active in the East by invading Manchuria at the last moment. The German war finished with the collapse of Berlin, Stalin ensured that Russian troops were the first into the German capital, and he calculated that this would give him the upper hand. Stalin had ensured that Russia was now a major world-player alongside America.

CHAPTER NINE

WORLD WAR II, INSIDE THE USSR

The simple fact of the USSR's capacity for industrial output, its geographical size, and the cheapness of life all ensured Germany was defeated. The human cost was immense and in Soviet terms people died in their millions from direct military action, starvation and over-work. The industrial output in tanks and aircraft was prodigious, but there was a total inability to feed the population. Hitler's regime will always be remembered for its brutality and "ethnic cleansing," but as the war turned against the Nazi onslaught Stalin moved populations at will. They ranged from Chechens, Tatars, Cossacks, and Meshketian Turks who were arrested *en masse* and deported or dumped in remote areas by the NKVD under Beria's directions. Moreover, even conservative statistics indicated that Stalin was responsible for more deaths than Hitler. Many parts of the Soviet area had a deep resentment of Stalin, and many would have welcomed the German invasion had the Nazi racial policy not been so obviously cruel. Hitler had visions of the Ukraine becoming his wheat basket, but such was the Nazi treatment of invaded territories even Stalin appeared the better alternative. A General Vlasov captured by the Germans had seemingly turned against Russia and offered to fight Stalin; this was probably because Vlasov had received orders from Stalin which had directly caused the surrender of his troops. Whether he was pro-Nazi is doubtful, but there was a deep hatred of Stalin by many of his own people.*

The extreme-authoritarian regime in Soviet Russia meant enforced military and economic demands, and only the fear of the Nazis made this acceptable. The penal camps were disastrous places where over half a million died from starvation.¹⁴⁷ The camps had become essential as a source of slave-labour, and they were frequently replenished from every conceivable source. There were occasional rebellions, but they were swiftly and remorselessly put down. The only escape for many was an order to join the penal battalions, a suicidal task of marching before Soviet tanks to clear

* Vlasov eventually was captured by the Soviets and hanged, and his followers sent to the Gulag camps.

mine-fields and clear the way against the German enemy. In the Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia, "strong detachments of nationalist insurgents fought Soviet troops and security forces, sometimes in pitched battles, with heavy losses on both sides. It took the regime time and effort to subdue these partisans."¹⁴⁸

Stalin had used the cunning ploy of divide and rule, of encouraging denunciation, and he used Political Commissars to keep an eye on senior Red Army officers. Stalin realised there had to be some give and take because men fighting in highly dangerous circumstances also needed encouragement. Soldiers were better fed than the population, epaulettes of rank were restored, saluting was reinstated, and even those officers who suffered during the purges were returned from the Gulag camps because the numbers being killed or taken prisoner were too high.

There were some who entertained the hope that Stalin's regime might improve after Germany was defeated, but for the more observant this was clearly not going to happen. Stalin had released his iron grip on the Russian Orthodox Church mainly because he needed their support. In Germany Himmler, Göbbels and Hitler all hated the Churches and they, like Stalin, had to recognise that many of their fighting soldiers retained a religious belief. In 1943 this change of policy towards the Church was signified when the Metropolitan Sergei was invited to the Kremlin, and thereafter the Orthodox Church assisted Stalin to increase the population's submission to his domination. As Franco had used the Church in the Spanish Civil War to give him a sense of respectability, so Stalin used the Church to ensure many of his soldiers fought on. In the same style Stalin started to appeal to the Soviet satellite peoples to stand firm, alleging that the Slavs had always had a natural bond with the Russian. The nationalistic appeal of fighting for the motherland was extended to cover all the main republics; "multinational harmony was emphasised."¹⁴⁹

Stalin also permitted some changes in the economic policies when peasants could grow their own food and do some old-fashioned trade.* Despite this food remained scarce and outside the military confines starvation levels were reached in many areas. Leningrad, despite efforts to relieve the city, was virtually starved to death. Most of the soldiers came from peasant stock and their rations were poor but adequate on the grounds they needed to fight, but their families starved. The young men who had

* The peasants were virtually slaves. They were allowed internal passports, so they were confined to their area of work. They were organised in two groups, the privileged state farms (*sovkhozy*) and collective farms (*kolkhozy*) which occasionally left some room for private enterprise. See Keep John, *A History of the Soviet Union 1945-1991* (Oxford: OUP, 2002) pp.15-16

driven the tractors and many others were taken into military service and this did not help the food crisis. The only thing which sustained the Soviet situation was the realisation that Hitler's polices appeared on the surface even more deadly than those of Stalin. It has been estimated that over ten million Soviet citizens died during the German occupation, half of them during captivity. Nevertheless, such was the hatred for Stalin that in places Hitler was able in some areas to carry out a recruiting programme. For most people the fear and hatred of Nazism remained dominant, and soon there had been thousands of partisans working behind enemy lines. The need to beat Hitler had a unifying effect upon many groups and peoples. In some ways it could be argued that Hitler was defeated by the Soviet Union because of his frenzied racial hatreds. Stalin thus headed a victorious country and remained in power.

CHAPTER TEN

POSTWAR

During the war the Soviet Union had faced three-quarters of all the German forces, over twenty-five million Soviet citizens were dead, and ten million Germans had perished on the Eastern Front. They had broken the back of the German war-machine destroying or disabling some six-hundred divisions. One thing was immediately clear following the German defeat, that in Russia Stalin had retained his full powers with his one-party and the one-ideology state; it was still in the same order he always intended. “Potential conflict between the people and the regime was nothing new but, by 1944, its social base had widened. The people knew who had won the war and how; defeat had been averted by mass exertion.”¹⁵⁰ Despite this critical feature the USSR was riven with problems economically, socially, nationally and to a certain extent politically. There was the total devastation of the land, and facilities and minorities were indicating signs of disaffection. The bereaved and exhausted population was prone to estrangement and the war-torn family was at the heart of these problems.



Zhukov

Many came back with loot including the commanders, and even Zhukov had collected his own show of pictures and gold.* “This imperial élite cast aside much of their old Bolshevik modesty” but looting was part of all soldier’s rewards on the Eastern front, and this included the Western Allies.¹⁵¹ When Solzhenitsyn was first arrested he was taken back for interrogation by “three SMERSH bums, more burdened by four suitcases full of war booty than by me.”¹⁵² The Germans had pursued this policy with vigour and Göring has gone down in history as the greediest of looters. The Russian response was understandable in the bitter hatred and subsequent recriminations, but the treatment of women and prisoners still causes major moral questions.

Since Hitler had started the war in 1939 the world had changed dramatically. The USA, the USSR, and Britain (the financially weakest of the three) had established the United Nations, but the so-called areas of influence meant that new borders were being carefully drawn-up giving place to what would become known as the Cold War. There now existed the Capitalism of the West pitched against a Communism which was global. China, although never subservient to Russia meant there was a large part of the earth’s surface which was now Communist, but in China and Russia there was no Communism in the original meaning of the word.

To a certain degree Stalin remained popular overseas because he had turned the war against Hitler, and many admired the centralised authority with which he had produced an industry which outstripped Nazi Germany, and the masses were becoming educated. He lost much of his popularity as news of his brutal regime and the Gulag camps slowly emerged in the outside world, and his imperial designs in Eastern Europe became apparent.

From his viewpoint, Stalin was concerned that Nationalism, which as far he was concerned had been one of the main problems which caused the Second World War, should not emerge again. The military in the USSR was built up rapidly, and Stalin and his cohorts did their best to maintain their image by keeping the Russian economic and administrative plight from the rest of the world’s observation. Stalin also ensured he was regarded as the sole saviour. He would not allow others to share in his glory, which was why he gave the victorious commander Zhukov a memorandum and signature from Beria denouncing him as a British spy. Stalin claimed he did not believe it, and suggested Zhukov would be wise to disappear to a minor role.¹⁵³ Beria’s signature was enough to frighten one of the Soviet’s greatest

* “The security agencies reported to the Kremlin that Zhukov had stolen a trainload of loot from Germany.” Service Robert, *Stalin* (London: Pan Books, 2010) p.528

wartime soldiers, but Stalin was ensuring the military were kept in their place, and he alone was to be regarded as the chief victor.

There is no doubt that the USSR had suffered considerably because of the war, and although the figures can never be ascertained there is little doubt at a conservative estimate the Russians lost some twenty-six million people because of the Nazi belligerence. In the one-time German occupied territory, the mortality figures were appalling, especially in Belorussia and the Ukraine. There were more females than males after 1945 and the streets were inundated with widows and orphans.* Many major towns, cities, and thousands of villages had been turned to piles of rubble, and for the bereft there was often no shelter and little food. It had been a major Nazi policy both in attack and especially in retreat to leave nothing, a vast and brutal scorched-earth policy. Europe was packed with refugees and Russia was even more chaotic as troops with their booty made their way home. It soon became clear any administration was lacking, and chaos was the rule of the day. In some ways it must have been a relief not to have state interference in every aspect of life. The State machinery was still in place, and the only attempt at reorganisation of any magnitude had been in February 1941, when the NKVD had become two agencies having a new department the NKGB, the People's Commissariat of State Security.†

As in Britain where Churchill was cast out at the elections in the hope for a better social future after all the suffering, there were similar hopes in Russia that life would improve. In their journey into Germany many Soviet soldiers had grasped how the West had lived, they had seen the remains of luxuries and a standard of living beyond their belief. It has been argued that this motivated Stalin to send them to the camps, and simply because those who had "allowed themselves" to become prisoners was reason enough for Stalin to impugn them. The people had suffered immensely during the war, many remembered the fear they had lived under during the purges before the war, they had often experienced military blunders, and probably rightly blamed all this on Stalin. His soldiers and people had learned how to fight and resist. None of this was helped by the above fact that the governmental administration made sure that returning prisoners of war were treated as traitors, and many were sent straight to the Gulag camps.‡ This attitude

* Only Britain and Sweden had encouraged a national system for state welfare.

† Beria had retained the NKVD, but the NKGB went to his protégé Merkulov, and this occurred when he was promoted to Deputy Premier and so remained responsible for both departments.

‡ It was the infamous Order No 270 which defined POWs as traitors. This was issued on the 16th August 1941 during the invasion which ordered Russian soldiers to fight to the last.

taken by Stalin was cruel and unreasonable, and it has been suggested that it possibly stemmed from his own dubious relationship with Hitler prior to Barbarossa.¹⁵⁴ More probably it was his warped paranoid attitude towards anyone he was suspicious about, especially those who had seen the Western way of life. It has been estimated that over four million Soviet citizens, military and civilian were repatriated after the war and only about half were permitted home. One cruel aspect of this was the way that the British and Americans returned prisoners when they knew what awaited them. It has been argued that the Western Allies took this action to ensure Westerners were returned, but this was a questionable reason. Mainly due to Solzhenitsyn there has been a good deal of literature on the cruelty of the Gulag system, because in most of the cases imprisonment and slave labour was just a suspended and painful death sentence. In the camps ordinary criminals often were made the overseers, and the whole situation reflected the concentration camps of Hitler's regime.

Nevertheless, there was still hope and a degree of anticipation that "the Soviet State would now treat its long-suffering subjects with greater consideration. Alas, this optimism was misplaced. It left out of the account the lethal logic of the Stalinist regime."¹⁵⁵ The undeniable fact is that repression was part of Stalin's political system. There were areas of protest and even some revolt, especially in the Ukraine where partisans had fought their own war. However, Stalin would have no talk of democracy as he ensured that his brand of Communism was to be the one permanent feature.

Once again, he started his rule of repression especially in the Baltic States and Western Ukraine, where mass deportations became the order of the day. As with the returning POWs many found themselves in labour camps because Stalin considered forced labour essential. In his effort to balance his power with the USA Stalin placed Beria in charge of researching the necessary data and personnel for producing an atomic bomb. The production of the atomic weapon and power changed the international scene and was one of the significant embryos of the Cold War.

Relationships with America for a time were cordial on the surface and it was clear that Stalin did not feel threatened by the West. He had given a speech at the Bolshoi Theatre in February 1946 based on Lenin's theory that with imperialism wars would occur because of the uneven development of capitalist countries, but he was aware of the Soviet and American tensions. He had warned Roosevelt and Churchill that Germany would rise again, but he remained confident Russia was not in danger. He believed this because he was confident that having won the 1941-45 war all would be well; he also believed that war-weariness would restrain Britain and possibly America, and at a cynical level he believed America only had a few atomic

bombs. It appeared at this stage he did not believe this to be a viable threat, even though he knew it had changed the balance of power. Nevertheless, “the symbolism of the atomic bomb had a pervasive effect on international politics in 1945-46, even though the bomb did not pose a real military threat to the Soviet Union at the time.”¹⁵⁶ The Americans were certain that possession of the atomic bomb would influence the Soviets, but Stalin made sure his reaction was played down as if atomic bombs were of no consequence. Molotov announced that the Russians would soon have atomic energy and warned against using it as weapon. The relationship between Molotov and the American Byrnes to an outside observer may have sounded cosy with their banter, but “February and March 1946 marked a turning point in United States towards the Soviet Union. American attitudes had hardened to the point where cooperation and agreement was now much more difficult.”¹⁵⁷

Stalin developed three general policies. The first was encouraging communist parties in Western Europe to create a sense of insurrection; the second was to appear cooperative with the West, and the third which he activated, was realpolitik because he saw or thought he foresaw a time when capitalist strongholds would reach the crisis time of war again. The existence of the atom bomb was forever present.

In the immediate aftermath of war Stalin was determined to make sure Eastern Europe became part of the Soviet Order, first by appearing conciliatory and generous then applying the necessary pressure. Stalin, while he was worrying about a possible conflict with the USA (which had now become a global danger), also had his own political problems with various economic tensions in the Politburo and amongst his cohorts. Zhdanov and Malenkov were at loggerheads over the government’s role, and whether to increase the national industry in the east or west dominated considerable debating time. There was the question of whether light industry should be encouraged, and Khrushchev continued arguing for large collective farms to resolve the continuing food crisis. All these politicians including Beria were constantly aware they had to seek Stalin’s support and approval. They had their own cabals of mutual support, and Beria at this time became linked himself with Malenkov, and in their power-play following Zhdanov’s death, they made sure Zhdanov’s followers disappeared by execution or Gulag incarceration.*

* There were rumours that Beria had Zhdanov poisoned. One Russian historian suggests Beria poisoned Zhdanov with or without Stalin’s orders, see Antonov-Ovseyenko Anton, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny* (London: Harper & Row, 1981) p.282 While Beria had every reason to wish Zhdanov dead it can only remain speculation. If written evidence were available, it would have been destroyed

The power struggle was mainly amongst Stalin's henchmen. The Politburo met less often, and the one-party state was governed by Stalin and his power-seeking cohorts. The priority was given to industrial output, especially weapons, and in August 1949 Beria's team exploded the first Soviet Atomic bomb at a test-site in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, everyday goods for the home were hardly produced because of the extensive efforts put into the military growth. Money was raised by taxes imposed even on home-grown foods and chickens, and by devaluing the ruble which brought money into the national coffers. Food remained the constant crisis, and there were serious famines in the Ukraine and Moldavia. In the town and city conurbations wages were abysmally low and it was a struggle to find better paid jobs, and there was little money to buy even for those who were successful in finding employment. There had been a serious blow to farming when in September 1946 a decree was issued that confiscated collective land, which during the war individuals and groups had farmed on their own account; there was to be no individual enterprise.¹⁵⁸ In 1948 taxes had also been raised both on the farms and the individual workers. Khrushchev had always been a proponent of what he called Agricultural towns (*agroroda*) in order that huge tracts could be worked by teams, but it was unlikely to succeed, and little interest was shown by the Party. Stalin's agriculture policy was not realistic despite his idea of a twenty-one-year plan to transform nature. He was more successful in the industrial area when after 1946 "recovery was impressively rapid."¹⁵⁹ The Dnepropetrovsk hydro-electric power-station was rebuilt, the coal mines in the Donets Basin increased output, and steel production rose. Individual work forces and factories guaranteed to attain their pledged targets, and this as an exercise was both hard work and at times grim. To the outside world it would have been impressive, but the cheap workforce and slave labour made it possible.

Stalin's main concern was not the suffering of the masses and their drab existence, but in making sure his territorial gains from the war were secure. He demanded that the Communist Party secured dominance in other countries, and he even advised the Party in countries such as France, Italy, and Greece, where the local communists had grasped a degree of influence, mainly because they had supplied the best resistance against the Nazi occupation. The fact that the Communist Party often received fewer votes in the Russian dominated parts of Eastern Europe was not a problem, because the Communists initially shared power with the other political parties before they took total control. This was all supervised from the

before entering the archives. However, more has come to light and it will be mentioned again in the next Part.

Kremlin as was the stripping of East Germany of its industrial sites and machinery. There were moments of resistance especially concerning the Soviet agricultural policies in Poland and Hungary; everything was in a state of flux. Poland before the war had been ruled under a benign form of dictatorship, but the ordinary rural workers were shocked when “every chicken or pig was inventoried, and special permission had to be granted by new village committees to slaughter them;” it was little wonder at the high degree of resentment.¹⁶⁰

When the Americans introduced the Marshall Plan, Stalin at first pondered the possibilities, but eventually objected strongly because he believed this was the American method of spreading their influence, and therefore regarded the proposal as an attack upon the Soviet Union. There is little doubt that the Marshall Plan in addressing the economic causes of Europe’s problems “would have the effect of reducing the potential sources of Communist support.”¹⁶¹ Stalin believed the intention was to create a Western Bloc and isolate the Soviet Union. As it was “Stalin was forced into a corner largely of his own ideological making. Were the USSR and Soviet satellite states to receive financial support, he reasoned, it would benefit the starving, but it would have an adverse effect on the Soviet mission to bring Communism to the world.”¹⁶² Stalin clearly saw America as the enemy and to accept help during this period would be for him a case of admitting their superiority. The danger of encirclement by enemies had often been perceived as a threat by the Russians and especially during the 1930s; the same perceived threatening situation surfaced once again in the postwar years.

Stalin organised a conference for all Communist Parties across Europe in Eastern Poland during which an information bureau was created called Cominform; this was to be Stalin’s device for total control across national borders. The various coalition governments soon became communist dictatorships and were mendaciously called “People’s Republics.” Only in Yugoslavia under its leader Josip Broz Tito, who was a contradictory figure, was there a lack of cooperation: Tito treated Stalin as his equal. For fear of Western intervention Stalin simply expelled Tito and Yugoslavia from Cominform. There is little doubt that Stalin’s thinking was taking the shape of creating a single transnational party that covered the globe.

When the Americans announced their intention to introduce the Deutschmark into West Germany Stalin started the notorious Berlin blockade, but the airlift and the self-evident wish that no side desired to go to war brought this point of potential conflict to a timely end. However, “it was the Berlin Airlift in 1948-49 that brought the Cold War out into the

open,”¹⁶³ and NATO was created as a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union.

Stalin remained deeply concerned about the ramifications of the Marshall Plan, and he instructed those who were within his hegemony not to accept such aid. Instead they had to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance known as Comecon. Members had little choice except to join, and throughout this period there was a continuation of more ruthless purges which clearly indicated the danger of objection or opposition.

As far as the West was concerned the growth of Communism was an increasing danger and the power of Stalin was formidable. When China signed a friendship treaty with the USSR nearly a quarter of the globe was communist, and the start of the Korean War sent shock waves across the globe.* The world had polarised between two diametrically opposed political systems, basically ignorant of one another, and with the incipient fear of a Third World War of grotesque proportions; Stalin remained in power and was something of a bull in a china shop at home and more pertinently abroad. The previous decades had seen the world divided between three ideologies, and now fascism had been dealt with Communism and the Liberal democracies with their capitalism faced one another as the only way forward.

Most Soviet people lived a mundane life trying to exist off the bare-essentials while the leaders and their immediate minions lived a very different life-style. “On the Council of Ministers’ territory there were several stores, supplied with the best provisions. To prevent the villagers from buying there, the administration of the dacha settlement prepared passes, which were issued to dachniks. To enforce this social-divide they had to place special guards at every gate.”¹⁶⁴ Life for a few Russians had changed, but most ordinary people suffered the same poverty struck grim existence of earlier days and could not protest. It was as Stalin’s daughter once wrote that “the twentieth century and the Revolution turned everything upside down. Wealth and poverty, pauper and aristocrat all changed places.”¹⁶⁵

* Kin Il Sung who had been a member of the Chinese Communist Party had been an established figure in the resistance against the Japanese and had joined the Red Army and was a committed Stalinist. The Russians installed him in Korea; he is often considered a major tyrant.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

STALIN: BERIA'S MASTER

It is frequently stated that Stalin dominated through terror and there is considerable truth in this claim; however, he also needed the support of his own elite to ensure this worked. As there had been a vast gap between the ruling Tsars and the rest of the nation, there developed the same gulf between Stalin with his selected cohorts and the masses. The Tsar may have dressed in fine clothes to impress people with his greatness, Stalin and his men dressed down to give the impression that they were of the people, though they lived luxuriously behind the scenes.* This gulf was essential to avoid any form of popular opposition. Stalin propagated the image as the leader essential to the country's safety from external dangers, and internally for economic benefit. The threat from the outside world was minimal because no one wanted another war, but Stalin created a sense of "hysterical isolationism" as "a product designed purely for domestic use to make it easier to divide and rule."¹⁶⁶ In Spain his hated enemy Franco another dictator was playing the same game, telling the people that Spain was isolated by enemies and he was the hero leading the siege. They were both pariah states and they utilised this situation for domestic reasons.

In the aftermath of the war Stalin became even more obsessed "with constructing an adequate historical alibi and thereby acquiring legitimacy."¹⁶⁷ He had attempted the elimination of Leninism, tamed the party, won the war which needed to be displayed, had history re-written thereby "switching to a nationalist 'great power' ideology."¹⁶⁸ The potential for further purges surfaced continually, and it gave the impression that Stalin often created the enemies within to create a sense of instability, so that he appeared to be the necessary saviour to hold everything together, both internally, and on the foreign threat level. However, he was only human, and after the war Stalin's

* During the latter part of the war Stalin wore a dress military uniform and allowed coloured epaulettes to be worn as in Tsarist days on the grounds that this instilled authority and discipline.

health showed signs of deterioration and he took extensive holidays in Abkhazia, where he was more interested in the international rather than the domestic scene. His minions remained in fear and their role became minimal as they jockeyed for position. As recompense, the members “remained alive and invulnerable, quietly growing old and fat in their dachas. Every single one of them, from Beria with his secret police to Malenkov and Mikoyan, who busied themselves with economics, did nothing but say ‘yes,’” according to Stalin’s cynical daughter.¹⁶⁹

Stalin rarely gave major speeches, pretended he did not need flattery, but like all dictators and especially Franco in Spain loved the adulation. His name was contained in what is best described as the Soviet state hymn, his works were published in their millions and the pockmarks on his face were brushed out in pictures and photographs. He tended to forget his Georgian background and became more nationalist as an ethnic Russian. Russia’s past and present became transformed, so Russia was exhibited as the greatest nation. Their history was re-written to substantiate this with nearly every invention and scientific discovery being allotted to some identifiable and famous Russian in the past. The authorities tried to block any foreign influence and the average Russian’s knowledge of overseas was limited. When the current author was travelling in Russia in 1979 a hotel porter asked whether Margaret Thatcher would cope with becoming Queen. There was presumably the constant fear that the grass in other lands was not only greener but more accessible.

The repression continued unabated especially in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; they suffered culturally as did the Moldavians. Perhaps the nationality which suffered most was the ethnic Jew. Even Molotov’s wife was imprisoned for greeting the Israeli emissary Golda Meir with too much enthusiasm, and for being Jewish herself.* Molotov’s wife Polina Zhemchuzhina had been friendly with Stalin’s wife, and being Jewish made Stalin highly suspicious of her. She was one of the few women to lead a government agency and Stalin threatened her as early as 1939, but she escaped his further notice until her meeting with Golda Meir, and survived imprisonment, dying in 1970. On the other hand, Sudoplatov noted that Stalin was probably using Molotov’s wife as a means of attacking Molotov himself, but it also involved the infamous Doctors’ Plot which had vast ramifications, and this will be explored more fully in Part Two.¹⁷⁰

During the war Stalin had tried to unite the various ethnic and national groups to fight the Nazi invasion, but soon after the victory Stalin’s anti-

* “For four years her daughter did not know where she was, and everyone considered Paulina Molotov dead.” See Alliluyeva Svetlana, *Only One Year* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) p.383

Semitism re-emerged. Some writers have suggested Stalin's anti-Semitism was a mere political ruse; this may have been partially true, but there seems little doubt he was fundamentally anti-Semitic. Many Jews started to disappear, and Stalin was asked to consider a Jewish Autonomous Region in eastern Siberia, as he had once in Crimea. He was angry with his daughter Svetlana for having a Jewish boyfriend, for his son having a Jewish girlfriend, and Jews found themselves restricted at educational and professional levels.* This sense of anti-Semitism always existed and Solomon Mikhoels, President of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, had been murdered on January 12th 1948, and Stalin's daughter had overheard her father on the phone instructing that it should be reported as a car accident.¹⁷¹ Sudoplatov later explained that Mikhoels had been poisoned by injection and his body thrown under a truck.¹⁷² In 1952 there arose this so-called infamous "Doctors' Plot" which created a period of serious anti-Semitic hysteria.[†] There was evidence that it was undoubtedly a trumped up charge, but it was claimed that these unfortunate doctors had a hand in the death of Zhdanov.[‡] Stalin even went so far as to have text books rewritten which omitted the fact that Marx was a Jew.[§] "The quintessence of Russia, for Stalin, was simple a catalogue of his own predilections, namely militarism, xenophobia, industrialism, urbanism and gigantomania."¹⁷³

Stalin and his henchmen, especially Zhdanov, attacked anything associated with the West, scientific scholarship (except Physicists because of the nuclear bomb development), literary works, art, and anything which

* Svetlana fell in love with Beria's son Sergo, though the relationship did not last. This relationship developed after Svetlana divorced Zhdanov's son, but Beria and his wife Nina opposed the marriage because his rivals might use it against him: see Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.321

† Anti-Semitism had been a consistent problem in Tsarist Russia and during the start of the war there were deep suspicions about Jewish people, and during the German invasion "anti-Semitism appears to have grown. In mid-August the Norwegian consul reported open signs of it in the capital." Barbar John in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.295

‡ This plot was set in hand by a letter from a Dr Lydia Timashuk who probably had pressure applied to her, or her letter was later used as an excuse for a purge. Later the police disagreed with ending the investigation and blamed Beria for prematurely stopping them, see Hopf Ted in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.380

§ For a full report on this strange doctors' plot and its aftermath see Gorlizki Y & Khlevniuk Oleg in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) pp.315-320

was not to their taste.* “The postwar cultural freeze is often referred to as the Zhdanovshchina,” and he attacked anything which was not perceived as party-line.¹⁷⁴ Zhdanov always believed it was essential “to bring the ideological front into line with all other sectors of our work.”¹⁷⁵ Shostakovich who had played so brilliantly at Leningrad was not allowed to perform. Ballet and opera flourished with official approval mainly because it was appreciated by members of the Politburo. “Zhdanov was to set the tone of Russian cultural and scientific life for the next twenty years.”¹⁷⁶ Even in the early 1930s the restrictions were immense and the need to pander to Soviet policy meant according to one diarist that “the films and plays get duller and duller. There is no country in the world with more material for plays and novels, and yet there is no country where the scope of writers is so strictly limited.”¹⁷⁷

The pervasive atmosphere of the Kremlin gremlins pandering to Stalin and trying to reflect his views had inestimable effects on the intellectual and cultural life of the country. Stalin’s cult was all part of the pseudo-intellectual fabric of the Soviet Union. When Boris Pasternak used a wrong phrase, he came under attack; life was all too sensitive and dangerous and political correctness was intensely restrictive. As in Nazi Germany decadent music such as jazz was banned, and saxophones were confiscated. In December 1949 the cult of adulation was reached when Stalin’s image was hung above the Kremlin in bright lights against the evening sky.

Stalin’s officials lived lives of luxury, but they kept their life-style and luxury well concealed to avoid provoking criticism either from the populace or colleagues. Their flats and dachas were decorated with items unobtainable by the public; they were the new elite. Their privileges gave them every reason to support the state and they would have been too terrified to have clashed with Stalin; few would forget that Molotov’s wife was in prison. As Stalin and his cohorts called for peoples in other nations to rise and revolt, no one in Russia would dare even think of this possibility.

Stalin had huge granite buildings erected to inspire a sense of patriotic pride, often today described as “Stalinesque” as with the blocks of grey looking high-rise flats. They were supposed to be prestigious monuments worthy of the new age and of Stalin. Commissariats became ministries, the Red Army was called the Soviet Army, and these alterations were often made by Stalin as a reminder to others that he was the source of any change.

* This was often known as Zhdanovism named after Andrei Zhdanov, and he chose any target which he suspected “of fawning on the west.” Lewin Moshe, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016) p.129. It was an extreme form of Russian nationalism and led to many minor purges.

Near the end of his days his sense of repression or pure nastiness started to frighten many of his traditional supporters. It has been suggested that Stalin was suffering from cerebral arteriosclerosis.¹⁷⁸ Stalin had many phobias and was paranoid with many contradictory sides to his nature, but as he neared the end of his life “there were disturbing signs that the strong, irrational urges were getting the upper hand.”¹⁷⁹ However, “despite the occasional physical lapse and temper tantrum, the overall thrust of the leader’s approach to rule over the last months of his life was entirely in keeping with the pattern of leadership he had established in earlier years.”¹⁸⁰ He even wrote a major book on economics with considerable input and discussion with experts, it was published but forgotten the day he died, and faded into obscurity.

He suddenly sacked his chief bodyguard, his doctor, his personal assistant and seemed to trust no one. He appeared to increase his high-level political intimidation, and it was soon realised by those closest to him that they might be next-in-line for a new purge because of his devious machinations. As in his final days when Lenin had smeared the names of his potential replacements, and Stalin in particular, Stalin copied him. Molotov and Beria became fearful for a variety of reasons, not least they suspected another purge was likely. It seemed in his last days as if he were preparing for major changes possibly with an eye to reminding his “comrades” he was still in charge. Two of his most senior men, Molotov and Mikoyan were often absent from his meetings because he foresaw them as challengers for his throne.

In 1952 he changed the traditional name of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; he accused Molotov and Mikoyan of political cowardice; designated the Politburo with the new name Presidium; increased its members to twenty-five and appointed a seven-man bureau of younger members. There was little doubt that some of his older colleagues must have wondered what would happen to them. It was becoming apparent that in 1953 “new purges were still being planned; and it was likely that death alone prevented Stalin from having his closest acolytes, Beria, Molotov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, and several others executed.”¹⁸¹ It was at this stage that he suffered a stroke in his dacha in Kuntsevo on March 1st, 1953. His cohorts were confused as to what to do, giving speculation to many conspiracy theories, but he died and was embalmed to join Lenin as a show-piece.*

* Many of the conspiracies emerged because the staff had asked for medical services, but Stalin’s colleagues prevaricated for more than a day, at the least; but there is no hard evidence that Beria was behind this incident.

Stalin left the Soviet Union as a superpower with the second largest industrial capacity in the world, and the population was literate and seemingly content. However, the “death of Stalin killed the institution of Stalinism, and so released the forces of change in Soviet society,” but Beria was a Stalin protégé and therefore manipulative.¹⁸² As a final note in this brief survey of Stalin’s Russia three leaders stood out as potentially taking over his throne, namely Molotov, Mikoyan and Beria with Khrushchev also emerging.* Beria was the question mark; because of his past he terrified the others and they were worried that Beria might use his troops to stage a coup. It had been pointed out by his major biographer that Beria had suddenly become more liberal in his views, he certainly had no party base, and it seems more likely that this was Beria’s manoeuvre for the future, mainly because his past behaviour made such a switch from oppression to reform highly unbelievable.

After some consultation it was secretly agreed to have Beria arrested and in December 1953 he was convicted in a private session and later shot. Beria had become as terrifying as his master Stalin, and now the dictator was dead it was essential that Beria joined him as soon as possible. This raises the question as to who Beria was, and whether he was simply a product of his day and age.

* Even in English provincial newspapers when Stalin’s death was merely rumoured, pictures of Beria and Molotov were shown as potential leaders: see *Eastern Evening News* (East Anglia) March 4th 1953. p.1

PART TWO

LAVRENTY PAVLOVICH BERIA

INTRODUCTION



Lavrenty Beria

If any person is asked to nominate the most well-known blood-thirsty tyrants there is a considerable list of potential candidates. When some post-graduate students were asked to provide names, a formidable list appeared. It ranged widely and included such candidates as Pol Pot in Cambodia, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Kim Il Sung in North Korea, the Turkish Enver Pasha for killing Armenians, the Pakistani Yahya Khan for genocide in Bangladesh, the Japanese leader Hideki Tojo, Chiang Kai-Shek, and the three most common on their lists were Hitler, Stalin and Mao Zedong; all belonged to the twentieth century. Such was the barbarity of the organised death tolls of these political leaders it is an unrealistic task even to try and estimate the number of people who died because of their policies and attitudes. These men were the leaders, but they had their henchmen ready to commit these heinous crimes. Probably the most written about is Hitler's

henchman Himmler who organised the concentration camps and created a sense of fear and terror with his secret police forces in Germany, and later in occupied Europe.

When Stalin attended the Yalta Conference, he had amongst his cohorts Lavrenty Beria whom he introduced to Roosevelt and Churchill as “*my Himmler*.” This was probably more accurate than either of the Western leaders would have liked to believe; they were possibly becoming aware of his atrocious crimes and inhumanity. Beria’s son later claimed this must have hurt his father who was becoming excited about stepping onto the international stage, rather than being regarded as the secret and sadistic policeman.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, Lavrenty Beria was as ruthless as Genghis Khan, as cruel as Vlad the Impaler, as manipulative as the best Machiavel, and a sexual predator of pitiless proportions. Furthermore, like all bullies he was a coward, and when he was eventually executed it is alleged his executioners had to stuff a rag in his mouth to stop him pleading for mercy.¹⁸⁴ As Solzhenitsyn wrote “those who have condemned many others to be shot often wilt at the prospect of their own death.”¹⁸⁵ After his execution Beria’s name was carefully expunged from Russian history, and although Himmler’s name remains well-known little is known about Beria. There are few adjectives strong enough to describe his cruelty, sadism, and lack of compassion.

Many assertions have been made about the man Beria claiming that after Stalin he was the most feared man in the Soviet Union. Stalin’s daughter wrote that “Beria was a born executioner and zealot, to whom the GPU was a vocation” and few who lived during his time would disagree.¹⁸⁶ “He came to symbolise all that was evil in this period,” and his conduct and personality traits remain like a hovering question mark over the nature of some aspects of humanity.¹⁸⁷ Stalin’s daughter for a variety of reasons hated Beria and with good cause, and later in life took every opportunity to disparage him. Her attitudes were based upon family reasons, referring to his unpleasant influence which she sometimes used in defence of her father.

There is some undoubted validity in her claims and there follows a list of eight of her observations: “I shall come back to Beria who seems to have had a diabolical link with all our family and who wiped out a good half of its members;” and “if a skilful flatterer like Beria, whispered slyly in his [Stalin’s] ear that ‘these people are against you’ that they have ‘compromising material’ and ‘dangerous connections,’ and if they had made trips abroad, my father was capable of believing it,” and “my father was astonishingly helpless before Beria’s machinations.”¹⁸⁸ She added that Beria’s “influence on my father grew and grew and never ceased until the day of my father’s death,” and “Beria was more treacherous, more practiced in perfidy and

cunning, more insolent and single-minded than my father.”¹⁸⁹ “He flattered my father with a shamelessness that was nothing if not oriental;” “at some point, unfortunately, they became spiritually inseparable,” and “the spell cast on my father by this terrifying evil genius was extremely powerful, and it never failed to work.”¹⁹⁰ Despite his daughter’s defence, Stalin was undoubtedly the tyrant, but he was assisted by Beria and his henchmen, and it is possible to understand why Stalin’s daughter hated him, and sometimes used her attacks on Beria to deflect them from her father. Nevertheless, she was there, knew Stalin and Beria well, and although she may have had her own agenda her views are interesting if not revealing.

The previous chapter on Russian history is critical because that unfolding drama and especially Stalin are all part of the complex Beria jigsaw. Like most dictators Stalin never felt secure even with his inner circle, which may have stemmed from problems relating to the retention of power; Franco and Hitler were of the same disposition. It was a matter of the divide and rule policy they all held in common, and Beria, although a single piece of the overall jigsaw puzzle, was critical for understanding Stalin.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell reality from myth and especially with a well-known felon. When Russia opened some archives under Gorbachev in 1990 the singular case of Wallenberg was questioned by relatives who were invited to Moscow.* Wallenberg’s bits and pieces including his passport were handed back, but it would have been too embarrassing to open all the files. The Russians tried to muddy the waters and journalists in Moscow were informed “that Wallenberg had acted as intermediary between Lavrenty Beria and the head of the SS Heinrich Himmler.”¹⁹¹ The mere mention of Wallenberg alongside Himmler and Beria was a clever device to smear anyone associated with these characters with an irredeemable stain; Beria’s image still haunts the scene.

The myths and legends that have surrounded the horrific image of Beria have sometimes, it is claimed, obscured his overall character and “detracted from the important role that he played in Soviet domestic and foreign policy from the pre-war years onward.”¹⁹² This point was made by his first and only Western biographer and has raised a few eyebrows. This issue was raised again when she added “moreover, the fact that he became a forceful

* Raoul Wallenberg (1912-1945, 1945 when he was last seen) was a famous humanitarian Swede who helped save Jewish people from the Nazis. Sudoplatov in his memoirs related that Wallenberg’s mysterious disappearance was no accident. He had been detained on Stalin’s and Molotov’s orders for matters relating to political blackmail.

proponent of liberal reforms after Stalin's death has not been fully understood."¹⁹³

This study will trace Beria's life including his rise to power, his many and various activities leading to his major role in the Soviet Union government under Stalin. It will show that a man of humble birth rose through the ranks of power to become one of the most notoriously feared servants of Stalin. As far as possible his motivations will be raised, and his deeds examined to understand what made a man like Lavrenty Beria.

CHAPTER ONE

BIRTH AND BACKGROUND 1899

Beria like Stalin was a Georgian by birth and was raised in the atmosphere of that country during a time when tough masculinity was a manly virtue. Loyalty, robustness, lacking fear, and having personal pride were just some of the characteristics of the ideal Georgian male. Geography was not all that Beria shared with Stalin, because he too was brought up in a background of a rural community, raised by his mother, and living the life of the Russian peasant. It could be claimed that even before they met that he was already Stalin's *alter ego* and a reminder to Stalin of his own origins. This type of background does not explain their cruelty towards people, whether against groups or individuals, but the experience of living as children in an impoverished landscape where the wealthy were self-evidently living in another world, would have carved a deep resentment and had a powerful influence. This physical backdrop may have provided some of the personality traits that he and Stalin shared. This does not imply that all Georgians would fit a similar mould. It is a frequent error to think that Frenchmen are built one way and the English and Germans another. It has always been a popular joke to project national characteristics, but if there is any truth in such humour it is limited. Naturally Georgian ideals and rural poverty would leave their mark, but they do not account for the final picture of an individual. The cultural background of any individual has a bearing, but it is unrealistic to use this as a mathematical formula to gain a predictable result; human beings are not and never have been factory models.

It has been suggested without evidence that Beria was descended from a Mingrelian prince, his birth was humble and in a small village, but he appeared, again like Stalin to have had a rich patron, probably his mother's former employer.¹⁹⁴ His birth was set in the geographical area of Caucasia in Georgia and this area on the map clearly indicates that it was a meeting place between the East and the West. Conquerors and invaders had found in Caucasia a useful cockpit to utilise and control. Its history is a kaleidoscope of contrasting colours, but by the middle of the nineteenth century it was part of the Russian system.

The Polish writer Thaddeus Wittlin wrote in his biography of Beria that Beria was known as “the man without history.”¹⁹⁵ He then spends pages on his early life, how he dressed and even his thought processes, how he behaved at school and from this the reader can only assume it is mere conjecture. The same writer makes firm assertions without appropriate reference, or reliable authorities to justify the facts. It makes for an interesting novel-type biography based on historical speculation. It is therefore important to leave him aside, and although the facts are minimal because Beria was “a man without history,” it is best to rely upon what is known to be true, flimsy as this may be.

When Beria was five years old there was already internal political division. Opposition to the Tsarist regime was evident, mainly led by Marxist Social Democrats who were split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. As known from the history section Lenin led the Bolsheviks and demanded a central disciplined organisation under proletariat-class rule, whereas the Mensheviks insisted on a looser more democratic element. At first the Mensheviks prevailed, but as Beria developed during his teenage years Lenin was gaining control. It was an age of political polemic and violence, and this was Beria’s background. Again, not too much should be read into this because there are many examples where people have been brought up against similar backdrops, but they have not developed in line with the evil and mischievous times into which they were born.

He was born on the 29th March 1899 in the village of Merheuli with the full name of Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria.* Merheuli is on the northwest corner of the Black Sea and Beria belonged to the Mingrelian ethnic class who were something of a minority and always jealous of their own traditions. He would always be very conscious of his Mingrelian origins to the end of his life. The area with its varied ethnic backgrounds still retained some of mankind’s older tribal instincts. The Mingrelians tended to be in agricultural work including wine production, and at times they had proved to be somewhat rebellious. They mainly consisted of peasant stock and were often regarded as backwards and existing on the outskirts of civilisation. Beria’s mother was Marta Ivanovna (Jakeli) and was deeply religious. She was widowed earlier, but she married a Pavel Khukhaevich Beria by whom she had one daughter and two sons, one being Lavrenty. Marta’s second husband died while Beria was at junior school, and as with Stalin, Beria was brought up by his mother. She later married a Georgian Jew called Levan Loladze, but by sixteen Beria had left home. It has been suggested, and only

* Lavrenty is the Georgian version of Laurence.

suggested, that Beria's real father was an Abkhazian landowner which might account for the patronage he received during his education.¹⁹⁶

According to a family friend called Danilov, Beria was not a bright student but was considered "cunning and devious;" how far such observations can be trusted, especially when as a teenager he did so well is questionable.¹⁹⁷ Given his rural background he must have been quite intelligent because after schooling in Sukhumi he went in 1915 to the oil centre of Baku in Azerbaidzhan, where he joined the course in the Poly-Technical School for Mechanical Building Construction. There is a degree of uncertainty as to the true nature of his study, one historian claiming he was an architect, but such is the vagueness of his background it can only be assumed that his course was something to do with architectural construction, building or design.¹⁹⁸ The day would come when he helped design his own dacha. It was evidently a course he wanted to do because Baku was nearly five hundred miles from home, which was a formidable distance for a teenager of only sixteen years. Like many in that generation he had to make his own way while still very young.

The frequently made parallel with Stalin's matriarchal upbringing could with a stretch of the imagination include Hitler whose mother outlived his father, and another dictator Franco, whose father left home leaving Franco emotionally dependent on his mother. Interesting as this may seem it has no real bearing on the moulding of Beria's character, because it takes little research to find men in a similar influential mother-relationship, who grew up not only normally, but aspired to do great things for fellow human-beings.

Leaving home at sixteen to move to Baku was not necessarily unusual in those days, but it indicated that Beria was brighter than Danilov suggested, and he was keen to elevate his social status. Beria helped finance himself like many modern students with part-time work and apparently received some support from one of his mother's previous employers, which may possibly have been his real father; this can only be speculation. By this age he would have been fully aware of the Great War and its unfolding ramifications, and equally alert to the growing opposition against the Tsarist control of Russian life and its satellite territories. He had been in Baku barely a year when he joined fellow students in the October of 1915 and organised an illegal Marxist group to study Communism, and he helped create links with the emerging workers' groups. Baku was a city and somewhat more susceptible to political agitation than the rural areas. There was nothing unusual in this behaviour as modern-day students frequently become politicised at their colleges, and mainly on the anti-establishment side; Beria's political interest like many other students did not fade. Many

young people hope for a better future for themselves and for the country as they perceive it should be, and for those with nothing to lose and much to hope for, the Left-wing often appears the best way because it demands change.

After the Tsar's abdication Beria joined the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which was receiving less support than the Mensheviks, except in Baku itself. It was at this stage that world events caught up with Beria and he was conscripted into the Russian army in June 1917 to serve on the Romanian front. His political activity increased, and he became the chairman within his detachment for the party and helped in the spreading of propaganda. This did not last long with the end of the Russian-German conflict, and he returned to his school and successfully concluded his studies in 1919 as an architect-builder technician. Given his rural background this was quite an achievement, and his political activities clearly demonstrated not only his ability, but a determination to succeed.

It was at this stage that Russia had descended into a series of civil wars, but in Baku the main fear was the advancing Turkish army, and the Bolsheviks in this area were in constant danger. It was a time of growing brutality and the lack of food reached devastating proportions, though as an apparently harmless student Beria survived. A new governing body in the area called the Musavat had shifted somewhat to the Right and opposed the Bolsheviks.* In 1919 Beria was designated to work in counterintelligence against the Musavat government, as the Bolsheviks were at this time an underground organisation. Beria's involvement with the Musavat government was going to create a problem for him even to his end-days. Some historians claim he did work for the Musavat and they may be right.¹⁹⁹ It was later decided that the Bolsheviks had asked him to take on this double role and time and time again Beria had to accrue evidence to defend himself against these charges. Whether he worked for the Musavat government or not was to challenge him right through to his trial and death.

By the age of twenty Beria had launched himself into a world in which he would one day dominate, come to understand and enjoy; it would be his route to power. He was finding in this turbulent background of intrigue a sense of purpose, and this would help formulate the type of person he would become. Life for him had started in an impoverished rural background, and he probably saw a potential route to becoming someone of significance; even young businessmen can think along these lines.

* The Musavat ("Equality") government consisted of Azerbaijani nationalists who demanded an independent republic which it started to establish through the offices of the Turks and British occupying forces. It was therefore regarded as "foreign."

He had become a spy which by the very nature of the assignment makes any person deceitful simply because that is the nature of the occupation. Being a “mole” was a task which placed a person in both camps leaving him or her open to accusations by all sides. A spy can be regarded by some as a hero, others as a threat, and to this day the task of a secret agent remains a potential vilification, leaving the candidate open to denunciation; a common danger in this period and to this day and age. Beria had been instructed (according to him) to pose as a member of the Musavat, and this left him wide open to doubt, which persisted throughout his life and was used by all his enemies and detractors. It was generally ignored by Stalin who always protected his favoured henchman. However, when Frinovsky a police chief in Azerbaijan passed on this information to Yezhov, it is probable that Stalin kept the material because of his habit of needing information in case Beria became a suspect in Stalin’s personal paranoid world.²⁰⁰ Khrushchev certainly found it useful in 1953 when emasculating Beria.

In March 1920 he stopped this activity to work locally, but he was soon asked to return to underground work in Georgia in gathering intelligence for the Bolshevik Eleventh Army. His power was growing as he was expected to set up his own network in Tbilisi. He was soon captured, but with intervention was released on the promise that he left Georgia at once. He did not keep that promise, but he adopted the new name of Lakerbaia and worked from the newly established Russian embassy, who were determined to overthrow the Menshevik hold on power in that region. He was arrested again despite protests from Kirov the new ambassador, went on a hunger strike, and again Beria was released, but this time expelled from Georgia in a prison convoy.

He returned to Baku in the summer of 1920 as a student in his old educational establishment for mechanical building, but he continued to work for the Bolsheviks on a committee dedicated to seizing property for the movement. For a short time, he returned to his studies, but the party appointed him to work in the Azerbaidzhan political police, namely the Cheka. Baku was an area which Lenin had demanded should be brought under Bolshevik influence, not least because of its oil resources. It was at this time there was a possibility, but only a possibility, that Beria may have seen Stalin who arrived in the area to give a speech in November 1920. Beria had also established connections with Kirov and Ordzhonikidze.* It was Ordzhonikidze who helped him escape the Musavat spy charges, for

* **Sergo Ordzhonikidze** (1886-1937) was Georgian Bolshevik about whom there is a great deal of mystery and lack of verifiable knowledge. He was instrumental in incorporating the Caucasus into the early Soviet Union. He fell out with Stalin and was apparently killed, but it was publicised as death by illness.

which he should have owed some personal indebtedness. As a young man Beria was being moulded to think not in terms of his natural homeland of Georgia, but the broader picture of Marxist belief of a world union. As with so many caught up in these tempestuous political times it is impossible to ascertain his deeper motivations. Some might be tempted to wonder whether he was the idealist of Marxist aspirations or whether he was using this as a route to further his own personal ambitions; he had already travelled a long distance from his humble origins.

In joining the Cheka, the AzCheka as all regions had their Cheka forces controlled by the Moscow VeCheka, Beria had found his natural habitat. Their task was to uncover counter-revolutionary plots and they were granted powers of summary justice. The period of Red Terror (1918-1920) was a period of extreme violence and brutality as the Bolsheviks imposed their will. As a young man, as in so many cases, this sense of power, to use modern idiom, would have undoubtedly “gone to his head.” To have an awareness of self-importance because of the power of life and death over another has been a characteristic of many individuals in history. The influence of the Cheka and its officers was to become a cause of concern for many, and at times it was reined in, but they were feared at all levels, and as the perpetrators of this fear some individuals blossomed in their power and position. It also led to a situation of mutual distrust and suspicion by the very nature of the task. Beria was mistakenly arrested again but soon released and learned that human trust is a precarious commodity. The paranoid Stalin would one day confide he trusted no one not even himself, and this attitude was naturally prevalent amongst those who worked in the so-called corridors of the political underworld. Even modern-day police officers in an open liberal democracy sometimes query the activities of their next-door neighbours, and it is understandable that in a ruthless society this sense of suspicion and doubt increases exponentially when personal safety is at stake. This was all part of Beria’s background and growth, especially as he was still young and open to powerful influences.

The Bolsheviks used young men like Beria to gain their adherence because their very youth made them exploitable, very much as later in Germany the most fanatical Nazis frequently emerged from the Hitler Youth. The Jesuits are supposed to have claimed that give them a child until seven years of age, and they would produce the man. The Bolsheviks were no different when they recruited young ardent men like Beria. Nevertheless, the question remains as to Beria’s personal motivations; his self-evident energy and ambition “seemed willing to do anything that was required of him by his Bolshevik superiors,” but his personal incentives remain

elusive.²⁰¹ The question as to whether he was an idealist or careerist at this age will remain elusive.

Beria's immediate boss was Mircafar Bagirov the twenty-four-year-old head of the local Cheka who had been involved in some bloody reprisals against the local population and, like Beria, was young and adapted with ease to the brutal repression.* He recruited Beria "and, after a few weeks, named him deputy secret police chief, at age twenty-one."²⁰² Beria and Bagirov formed their own alliance looking after one another to the bitter end in 1953. Bagirov had known Beria before he joined the Cheka and was possibly responsible for his appointment and early career in which he blossomed rapidly. Beria was made chief of the Secret-Operative Department and deputy Chairman of the AzCheka; this had to be the influence of Bagirov. Beria appointed as his secretary a young ex-medical student called Vladimir Dekanozov who would remain close to Beria.[†] In the climate of this period even the powerful had to have some acquaintances they hoped to trust. Beria was immediately launched into a world of intrigue to which he easily adapted, not only seeking out and crushing the enemies, but beginning his life-long habit of intrigue against his own superiors in the hope he could destabilise them to his own advantage. "His next boss, Ivan Pavlunovsky, pleaded at staff meetings for his deputy Beria to cease intrigues against him."²⁰³

The Cheka's main task was to crush any counter-revolutionary group which was interpreted with the widest possible guidelines; it was a time of festering chaos, distrust and sheer brutality. In 1921 the troika system was announced which was a three-man committee empowered to judge and execute on the spot, and Beria played a major role in such proceedings in his area of responsibility. In his very early twenties he had become accustomed to having people killed, not in the front line of war but dragged off the streets, or out of their homes, and shot in police cells. Soldiers have the plea that in war they often become ruthless by force of circumstances and the need for survival, and they can be stirred by the desire for retribution and prone to bloodlust frequently caused by their involvement in violence.

* **Mircafar Bagirov** (1896-1956) was always close to Beria. He had taken part in the October Revolution and the Civil War. He was the Communist Leader of the Azerbaijan SSR from 1932 to 1953. He tried to survive the downfall of Beria but was tried in 1954 and executed in 1956, though some claim he died in Siberia.

† **Vladimir Dekanozov** (1898-1953) served in the Red Army in 1918, joined the Bolshevik Party on 1920. He was a secret agent in Transcaucasia and member of the Cheka in Azerbaijan where he befriended Beria. He joined the NKVD in 1938 as Beria rose in national status, then became Deputy Chief of NKID (Foreign Affairs) in 1939; in 1940 he was Soviet Ambassador in Berlin. He was executed in 1953.

The Cheka had no such excuse, they followed political orders and chose and executed suspects often with motivations beyond political necessity. It is immediately apparent that Beria and the many men like him could be described as cold-blooded, and by some perceptions as downright evil. It could be argued that it was political passion for a justified cause, but the fact remains that by the age of twenty-one Beria's character was forming into a killer who was impervious to the individual and lacking in any compassion. How far he was driven by the events fermenting around him, or by his developing character, or the influence of others will be explored later. Beria was to become the most feared man after Stalin, the tyrant who was already formulating the milieu of future years as the man to be most feared.

Beria was criticised by Mikhail Kedrov for convicting the wrong people and allowing serious opponents to escape.* Nothing happened because of Kedrov's report, until 1939 when Kedrov was executed after he criticised Beria once again. A significant aspect of Beria's make-up was his sense of vengeance, and as he grew in power it was fatal to cross swords with him or be perceived to stand in his way. The Cheka was not without its critics at this stage, especially when party members became aware that even they were under observation. In Soviet history there constantly remained an uneasy relationship between party members and the political police, even at a senior level. This will always be the case in any State where the police are political and secret. Göring in Nazi Germany became concerned about Himmler's investigations: "On the occasion of the *Rote Kappelle* scandal Göring knew he was being investigated by Himmler and gave his detested colleague Flyers Wings to bribe him away from this particular investigation. All of these henchmen viewed one another with suspicion."²⁰⁴ Whenever a state deploys a Gestapo, or a Cheka, fear soon becomes a dominant feature of daily life and helps formulate any person's behaviour. In Russia it was initially agreed after a period of tension over these matters that the Cheka should not investigate or arrest members of the Party. Many of the complaints had been against Beria who was already becoming a controversial figure. He was making his mark, but he was also extending his power by serving on various governmental bodies outside the Cheka within his area.

At a personal level Beria married Nina Teimurazovna Gegechkori who was related to an important Georgian Bolshevik, who during an earlier time

* **Mikhail Kedrov** (1878-1941) was a Soviet politician and secret policeman who was reportedly cruel and barbaric. He slaughtered people and threatened to annihilate whole communities. There was alleged mental illness in the family, and he and his son Igor often complained about Beria to Stalin. Beria had him executed under his personal orders.

had spent time in prison alongside Beria, from where Beria first saw Nina. The marriage took place in 1921, and Beria proposed to her when she was sixteen. It was a marriage arranged in secret in case of family objections, and although she was Mingrelian like Beria it was thought by some never to be a happy marriage, although other historians and observers claim otherwise. There are of course other versions of events; Stalin's daughter later claimed that when Nina was living in her native Mingrelian village and "upon hearing that Lavrenty Beria, Head of the GPU of Georgia, had arrived, she went to plead with him for her brother's release—he had been arrested. Beria had arrived in a special train. Nina entered his car, and never again saw her native village. She was carried off, her beauty having caught the police boss's fancy. He locked her up in a compartment. That was how she became his wife."²⁰⁵ The truth will never be known, but these rumours abounded, and the truth may simply be that because it was a secret marriage that such rumours took root. The story Stalin's daughter relates probably grew from the possibility that they had eloped on Beria's train. Despite his sexual predatory nature, the marriage lasted and "she remained in love with her 'charmer' throughout her long life," it has been claimed.²⁰⁶ Whatever the truth, Nina stayed with Beria and she became a student of a famous pioneering chemist and was obviously a science-academic in her own rights.²⁰⁷

The Bolsheviks were still facing opposition in Georgia and Beria was transferred to Tbilisi in November 1922 to the same position he had held in Baku. Moscow had decided that to run a local Cheka effectively they needed local people; Beria was therefore a natural candidate and he started looking for local help and support. The area was unsettled because the Mensheviks remained popular and the peasants were unhappy over land shortage and the general decline in the economic situation; Georgia had also become accustomed to its independence. Despite these constant rumblings Stalin helped by Ordzhonikidze enforced a treaty on Georgia uniting it with Azerbaidzhan and Armenia into a form of federation of Transcaucasian republics in the March of 1922; unlike Lenin (who protested from his sick-bed) Stalin was determined on centralising all power.* In order to accomplish this policy the new federation was incorporated into the USSR within a month, despite Georgian attempts to retain their identity. Stalin was determined to have his way, and Georgian rights were slowly but surely

* The Trans-Caucasus is an important area; the Caucasus Mountain range is a natural barrier separating Eastern Europe from Western Asia. The Caucasus region was separated between North Caucasus (Cis-Caucasus) and Trans-Caucasus (South Caucasus).

stripped away as Stalin pressurised men like Beria to take the hard-line approach.

Beria's transfer to the Georgian Cheka was the beginning of his rise to power. The Cheka was needed to ensure that Georgian politics rid itself of any desire to remain independent and be totally subverted to Moscow. Beria was undoubtedly chosen because it had been observed that his ruthlessness paid dividends. Beria would also have been aware of this reason, and he recognised that his ability to suppress perceived opposition through fear of barbarity would be his ladder to success. Unfortunately, as with many young business executives today, if success means walking over bodies and disregarding normal human restraints, then it has to be done. There are powerful human impulses behind this kind of behaviour, but this will be explored further in the final analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

RISE TO LOCAL POWER 1922-1931

During this period Beria rose through the local ranks of power and eventually transferred to the highest party offices in 1931, but if it were an exciting and at times precarious period for Beria, it was life-damaging for many others. It was the time when bourgeois homes and hotels had been taken over by the ascending people of the new emerging order. Many of the rich and well-off had fled, others had kept a low profile, or had merged with the new social elements. Beria with his wife Nina took over a large apartment at 57 Kiacheli Street, Tbilisi, which was to remain his residence throughout his time with the Georgian police. In the same apartment building lived Beri's immediate boss Kvantaliani and his family, as well as Ordzhonikidze's brother. Other young men lived together in hotels which had become dormitories, as this was regarded as the correct thing to do in the developing ethos of the day. The photographs of Beria indicate he wore *pince-nez* glasses (often popular amongst the so-called intelligentsia but becoming unusual) as he did throughout his life, and his physical features were not enthralling; as noted by Stalin's daughter Svetlana who described his face as repulsive at the best of times.

Beria's character was evolving as a man determined to succeed: "when we Bolsheviks want to get something done," he said, "we close our eyes to everything else."²⁰⁸ Bukharin was later to note that he was extremely intelligent and charming and "he dominated his entourage with his intelligence."²⁰⁹ This characteristic of Beria's high intelligence is noteworthy, but more pertinently his passion for personal ambition developed early in his rise to power. Beria's boss moved into the same premises with Beria, probably because he was encouraged to do so. It would prosper any young and up-and-coming ambitious man to have neighbourly access to his immediate superior. Beria would frequently join in the social gatherings of his superiors, and those below on the power-rungs as would be the case with many young men with an eye to their own futures. He gathered around him some cohorts who would do his bidding, and they were often referred to as "Beria's gang." Many of them were ex-soldiers, often barely educated, and like Beria were looking to their futures, even if it meant carrying out the most barbaric

orders. The tribal instincts remained in place and Beria often selected Mingrelians belonging to his own ethnic background. Beria never lost this habit of surrounding himself with loyal minions, who easily gravitated towards a person they felt was going places. Beria rewarded them with apartments and security, and they in return also “admired him as a professional in police work and a patron.”²¹⁰ One early important comrade was Merkulov who assisted Beria with his Russian language, which at this time was moderate in terms of grammar and idiom.* Merkulov would stay loyal to Beria to the end, and he only turned against him to save his own skin; it failed.

The Georgian Cheka had been established in early 1921 and was critical of the Bolshevik policy of centralising and bringing everything under the control of Moscow. It was the careful need for meeting this challenge that had promoted Beria’s boss Kvantaliani (now Beria’s domestic neighbour) who had replaced his predecessor, who had been less keen on centralisation. (He had landed up dying from tuberculosis in prison.) By 1922 the Cheka was replaced by the GPU, but it conformed to the policy of centralising Soviet control by traditional brutal force.

The major problem faced by the Bolsheviks at this time was the opposition to their control in these Georgian borderlands. This naturally led to brutal repression by the Cheka with the full support of the government. It was not just an attack on the counter-revolutionary elements, but became a time of vendettas against the remaining bourgeois, and any person who attracted the attention of the secret police. Mass executions became the order of the day, mass burials, and fear dominated the region. The Mensheviks at first were ignored but soon came under the same threat of annihilation. By the end of 1923 there was a move for independence in Georgia but the Cheka, with Beria as one of the leading components, crushed it with sheer brutality. It has been suggested that Beria and his superior Kvantaliani all but encouraged this revolt claiming it would bring the insurgents to the surface with a view to crushing them more effectively.²¹¹

During these years Beria proved to be cunning and proficient at seeking out and killing the opposition. Whole families and villages, people with the same surnames or the slightest connections were murdered by the Cheka and army; there was no mercy. No reliable records of those killed are

* **Vsevolod (Boris) Merkulov** (1895-1953) started as a detective for the Cheka in Georgia, then from 1925-31 was the Deputy Head of the GPU in Adzharistan (Ajaria). For a few months he was the Peoples’ Commissar of State Security but following the reorganisation from 1941-43 he was Deputy Peoples’ Commissar of the NKVD. He was deeply involved in the Klaus Fuchs atomic spying episode. In 1946 for a brief time he was a minister of MGB but was executed in 1953.

available, but it amounted to thousands upon thousands of victims. It was not as if the sole responsibility could be placed at the feet of men like Beria because they had the full support of the local and Moscow government. It often meant that even opposition or critical dissent in the communist ranks could not escape this sense of purging.

Stalin kept an eye on any opposition or critics within the Communist party, many subversive elements were sent to the Far East, including Lavrenty Kartvelishvili “who had not been able to get along with Stalin’s protégé and favourite in Georgia at that time, Lavrenty Beria.”²¹² Later Beria insisted this old rival be brought from Tbilisi where he made him dance to the blows of his club. Beria and many others at this time, mainly in their twenties and generally young men, often indicated a willingness to kill people through sadistic torture. They seemed to have abandoned any sense of morality, human compassion and killing people had simply become a necessary task to be carried out in the name of the cause, and upon the demands of their superiors. Any distinction between the cause of Bolshevism and natural justice became blurred and irrelevant. The sheer fear and terror experienced by the people brought submission quickly, and Beria’s effectiveness was noticed not only by his immediate superiors but also in Moscow. Such was the brutality in subduing any sense of a national Georgian identity, and crushing the Mensheviks, that questions were raised by some observers, and Moscow was obliged to send Sergo Ordzhonikidze to investigate the situation. As already noted above Beria knew Ordzhonikidze well, his brother lived in the same apartment, and undoubtedly this saved Beria from any implications in the pseudo-blame game which ensued. When in 1924 Beria’s wife gave birth to a son, Beria named him Sergo after Ordzhonikidze who was also a godfather; it was almost a matter of family, or seemingly so because this machination undoubtedly suited Beria’s ambitions. The repression had worked, and the Mensheviks and any form of related opposition was totally subdued during this localised reign of terror.

Beria was becoming known and it is generally believed that Beria met Stalin sometime during the mid-1920s, and probably on the occasion when Stalin decided to take his holidays in the area. It was rumoured that Beria arranged to use prison labour to have a holiday home built for Stalin. In 1925, Mogilevskii, the chairman of the Transcaucasian Cheka was killed in a plane crash, and Beria hoped for immediate promotion. Such were the times there was speculation that Beria had organised this death, but there is no verifiable evidence to give substance to such a claim; such was Beria’s character even at this stage it was easy to see why such speculation arose. Beria wrote his ex-boss’s eulogy but in such a fashion as to promote

himself.²¹³ This preferment was a step too far for the ambitious Beria, but he had played his hand cleverly, and not long afterwards he was promoted to the post of Chairman of the Georgian GPU and his boss Kvantaliani was moved sideways.

There now started a life-long habit of infighting for position with those above him. In his position Beria was able to collect information on anyone he wanted to denigrate, including high party officials. It was a weapon he would utilise all his life, using embarrassing information to undermine a potential rival's reputation, and dropping malicious hints while pretending to be an innocent bystander with only the good of the Bolshevik cause in his heart. This aspect along with his brutal behaviour gained him and the GPU many enemies and critics. He was at one time attacked on a military road leading to Tbilisi by Georgian terrorists or more likely bandits, and apparently some of his colleagues were killed, but it is claimed he fought them off and won a medal for bravery. Other accounts claim it was his bodyguard Boris Sokolov and the driver who fought them off; it was certainly Sokolov who was wounded.²¹⁴ It is difficult to know how many of these stories were fabricated or enlarged; on another occasion Beria was reputed to have covered Stalin's body on a launch when some shots were fired from the shore.* It has even been suggested that Beria contrived the attack so he could undermine the hated Lakoba who was responsible for security in that area.²¹⁵ It certainly brought Beria closer to Stalin.†

His 1927 promotion at the Fifth Party Congress also saw the departure of his supporting acquaintance Sergo Ordzhonikidze to Moscow. This old friend was now closer to Stalin and carried political influence of which Beria was judiciously aware. Beria stayed in touch with Ordzhonikidze sycophantically informing him of what was occurring, apologising if he made mistakes, and generally flattered or grovelled depending on the circumstances. He ensured that he was heard about at the highest possible level. Beria was determined to rise in the ranks as fast and as far as possible. Beria was already the arch-manipulator and Machiavellian in his devious

* This incident happened in 1933 when a guard had supposedly challenged the launch which had not responded, and warning shots were fired. Stalin appeared to accept the explanation, but Beria pursued the matter relentlessly. See Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) pp.141-142.

† **Nestor Lakoba** (1893-1936) was the Communist leader in Abkhazia when incorporated into the Soviet Union, and Lakoba remained somewhat independent because of his close relationship with Stalin. Because of his status Beria clashed with him, he was then regarded as an enemy of the people and died in 1936 by Beria's machinations. In 1953 his reputation was rehabilitated.

machinations. It only needed Beria's slightest suspicion for any individual to come under scrutiny, and although Party members were immune from outright arrest, this did not stop secret files being compiled on them. The Tsarist Okhrana had watched the working classes in support of the government, but the GPU's tentacles, especially under Beria, knew no boundaries; the developing Soviet system was becoming a police state of terrifying proportions. As the self-evident Georgian opposition was crushed Beria turned more and more to what he considered the inside-enemy lurking within the Party. Moscow was aware of the infighting in Georgia, but Stalin was only concerned that the Party objectives were implemented.

However, there were complaints about what was happening, and in September 1929 a delegation supported by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze was dispatched from Moscow to investigate irregularities, and to scrutinise excessive behaviour and abuse by some major figures; Azerbaidzhan was the first republic to come under this type of scrutiny. Much of this may have been prompted by Beria's letters of criticism about senior men, but he himself was aware that the investigation might look towards him, and cleverly warned Ordzhonikidze that everyone tended to blame him. It was an astute but crafty move of prophylactic self-defence, pointing out that those under investigation would of course blame the GPU. In a letter to Ordzhonikidze he suggested he should be transferred out of Georgia (undoubtedly seeking promotion) which his political mentor ignored, but on the other hand he shielded Beria from criticism.²¹⁶

The result was a series of changes amongst senior men, but Beria retained his position and now his repression turned in a new direction to serve Stalin's policies. It was at this stage that Stalin had started to demand the implementation of the policy of collectivisation, and the anti-Kulak campaigns were started to ensure these policies were implemented throughout the old empire. The average peasant in Georgia was less well-off than his Russian counterpart, and initially the local administration was somewhat soft in its approach with the confiscations of lands. The central government in Moscow directed by Stalin had no time for the economic circumstances of its poorest citizens or their livelihood, and they demanded action. Beria, now mainly bereft of Menshevik opposition, turned his brutality onto the peasants, also knowing that this would please Stalin.

During 1929 to 1930 the repression was so brutally severe that huge numbers were being shot, and it led to opposition from the peasants which was repressed by the GPU with the support of the army. The GPU and government views were simply that these protests typified anti-Soviet elements, counter-revolutionaries and were motivated by secret organisations opposed to communism. The true motive for opposition came from

desperate people trying to maintain their traditional means of living and attempting to survive. The barbarity reached such a level that it caused a reaction in Moscow when Stalin in March 1930 suddenly decided to apply the brakes on rapid collectivisation.

However, Redens, Beria's local superior was a weak character and tended to follow Beria who was undoubtedly behind the chaos of this repression.* This was a tenuous moment for Beria who inveigled Redens at the Transcaucasian HQ to send a message to the OGPU leadership in Moscow.† This message sent the exaggerated idea that there were deep anti-government movements in Georgia even amongst the party leaders and officials, and the collectivisation policy was being used as an excuse, and would soon lead to a counter-revolution. Stalin read this note from Beria and Redens, and the officials were ordered to let the GPU continue their work. The barbarity increased drastically, and at one notorious moment Beria promised that if the rebel peasants returned home then they would be given a form of amnesty; when they did, they were all promptly shot. This incident of "the note" had again advanced Beria's ambitions not only because it increased his standing with Stalin, but it led to yet another shake-up of the Georgian leadership. He managed to discredit the leadership and elevate himself at the same time. Although during this time Beria's focus was on Georgia his reputation was growing beyond the Transcaucasian borders.

Beria continued to plot and plan his rise and made sure that any potential leader should never stand in his way, including his weak boss Redens who was transferred by Stalin because of Redens' behaviour. This action against Redens had been a characteristic set-up by Beria who ensured his boss was drunk and sent him out in public to make a fool of himself. Apparently Redens had battered down the door of a female employee who called for the local police, which Beria promptly reported to Stalin.²¹⁷ Another account is that Beria made Redens so drunk he walked home stark-naked.²¹⁸ Both accounts could be true. One way or another Beria ensured the way ahead was not cluttered with possible rivals.

* **Stanislav Redens** (1892-1940) was born of Polish parents and a secret police official. He joined the Cheka in 1918, and the Crimean GPU in 1922-23 where he became widely known for his brutal repression of the Kulaks. In 1928 he was Chief of the Transcaucasian GPU but was side-lined by Beria. In 1933 he was recalled to Moscow and elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in 1937. He was accused of running a Polish underground group and was arrested and shot in 1940. In 1961 under Khrushchev his reputation was rehabilitated.

† Because of this Redens was sometimes referred to as "Berens." See Knight Amy, *Beria Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: University Press, 1993) p.43

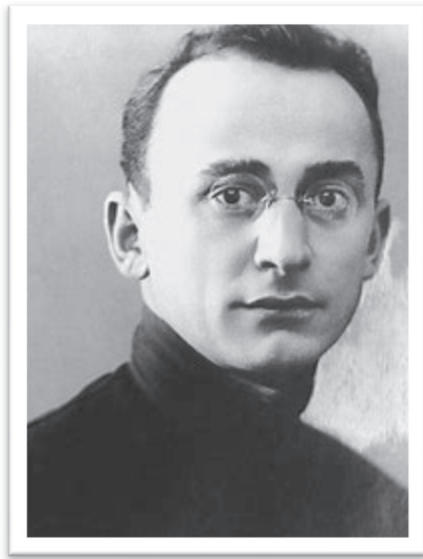
There was one curious incident during these years when Beria's wife Nina had an uncle caught in an unfortunate incident with a prostitute; this man had a propensity for this kind of conduct. Beria stifled any investigation of the matter, but even at this stage of his development it is easy to speculate he did not act out of compassion for this uncle, but for the sake of his own reputation; the uncle was a family member which might raise questions about Beria.*

Beria's reputation was important to him as he ascended the scales of power, and in November 1930 he became a member of the Georgian Central Committee and was involved in policy making. Much of his political rise was due to Ordzhonikidze and Stalin's interest in this useful servant. Beria would visit Stalin whenever he took his holiday breaks at Sochi, and even though it was out of his area he took over the security of Stalin's residence. His attention to Stalin was obsequious, and Stalin would have seen in him a "yes-man" who was prepared to carry out any request. He was always there when Stalin arrived, and Stalin's daughter found his constant presence difficult to handle as previously noted. Stalin recognised how useful Beria would be and proposed he should be First Secretary in Georgia, and then as Second Secretary of the Transcaucasian Central Committee against which there were loud protests. There were changes in the leadership, and Beria was in the ascendancy as he had planned, and he was only thirty-two years old. There is no doubt he was an ardent careerist.

* Later this same uncle embezzled government funds but committed suicide rather than face the consequences.

CHAPTER THREE

GEORGIA AND TRANSCAUCASIA 1931-1938



Beria as a young man

Beria's appointment met with loud protests both locally and beyond his normal circuit of involvement. The Tbilisi Party committee was especially vociferous in their protestations, undoubtedly based on Beria's habits of undermining anyone who stood in his way of progress. Many threatened to resign rather than work with a man who would have them denounced if they criticised him. However, Stalin was demonstrating his dictatorial powers; the protests at Beria's appointment were in vain and few wished to cross swords with Stalin. Stalin eventually met the opposition and said "we'll settle this question the routine way...and angrily ended the meeting, appointing Beria Georgian First Secretary and Second Secretary of Transcaucasia over their heads. Beria had arrived."²¹⁹

Beria, fully aware of this opposition stood firm by asserting his authority immediately. He made sure the Georgian Party understood his areas of responsibility as First Secretary, which included not just the feared GPU, but agriculture, oil-refining, resorts, and later in 1936 he would publish a report on his success; such self-propaganda reports will be noted later.

When in January 1932 he made his first public appearance as the local Party chief his report was published with a full-sized photograph of himself, produced under his instructions, and indulging in his usual policy of self-promotion. At the same time, he sent out his familiar warning against the Mensheviks and the Kulaks, claiming they were counter-revolutionaries against true Bolshevism. Later he attacked deposed party leaders constantly making reference to Stalin, a cunning ploy he would use all his life. In his attack on the older party leaders he would have had support from Stalin who wanted to rid himself of the original party members who either knew too much about him, or because of their early revolutionary enterprises might not have venerated him sufficiently knowing *he was just one of us*, (as mentioned in Part One). As far as Stalin was concerned Beria was an up-and-rising cohort prompting Stalin to write to Kaganovich that “Beria makes a good impression” meaning he was a useful tool.²²⁰/*

Meanwhile Beria continued his lifelong habit of insinuating to Stalin that Orakhelashvili and Lakoba were failing, doing so out of sheer personal ambition. Beria wanted to broaden his power beyond Georgia, and he cast his ambitious eyes towards Mamia Orakhelashvili the party leader of Transcaucasia; the area which included not only Georgia but Armenia and Azerbaidzhan.[†] Whenever Beria spoke it was as if he represented not just Georgia but the Transcaucasian Federation.

Ensuring he was not forgotten in Moscow, he maintained his obsequious correspondence with Ordzhonikidze, no doubt in the anticipation he would continue his support because he realised that Ordzhonikidze was close to Stalin. He corresponded on many matters ranging from the Kulaks and agricultural problems, to the conditions in Tbilisi, and the need to allow the Mingrelian language to be used at an official level. This relationship with Ordzhonikidze was starting to show signs of decline as Beria became aware that many of the people he had helped depose from power, had gone to see

* Later Kaganovich's brother Mikhail was accused by Stalin of building aircraft-fields too close to the border; Beria and Malenkov interviewed him, and he allegedly shot himself in the toilets. He had become a scapegoat for the developing aircraft blunders at the start of the war. Despite this hideous attack on his brother Kaganovich stayed loyal, denying he had any part.

† **Mamia Orakhelashvili** (1881-1937) was an active Bolshevik politician in Transcaucasia and later part of the *Pravda* board. He died during the Purges in 1937.

Ordzhonikidze, and they had complained not just about Beria, but the fashion in which he spoke about Ordzhonikidze in a critical way. Beria wrote immediately once he heard how he was being reported, denying their accusations as a fabrication designed to fracture the close relationship Beria shared with Ordzhonikidze. However, the relationship became somewhat tense when Ordzhonikidze's brother Papulia was sacked from his post with the railways, and Ordzhonikidze discovered Beria had done little to help. Beria protested he had tried to help, and whether Beria told the truth or not it initiated a degree of tension between the two men. Ordzhonikidze may also have been aware of Beria's various machinations to rid himself of Orakhelashvili, but Beria was eventually successful because Orakhelashvili was demoted, and by January 1934 Beria held both posts at the same time. One Russian historian noted that "Beria was a confirmed criminal type who had pursued his calling by serving the secret police...and with meticulous cruelty he massacred the party veterans in the other Transcaucasian republics as well as Azerbaidzhan and Armenia...later Beria was to tell his boss how he had gloated over Mamia Orakhelashvili, one of the true founders of the Bolshevik organisation in Transcaucasia."²²¹ It was dangerous to stand in the way of Beria's ascendancy. Beria's old friend Bagirov had returned, and as always pandered to Beria ensuring that Beria was respected if not praised.

Beria's relationship with Ordzhonikidze continued but not with the same closeness of earlier days. Ordzhonikidze visited Transcaucasia in 1934 and travelled the area with Beria, and even recommended that Beria and Bagirov receive the Order of Lenin for their work in oil-extraction, but their relationship remained strained compared to earlier days. It was apparent at this stage that Beria was developing an interest in economics. He was no expert but was self-evidently intelligent enough to see what was required. This perception was based on the demands by Stalin in Moscow who realised that economics, as noted in the history section, remained a serious problem. He always responded to Moscow's demands with his sharp political antennae, reacting and producing long written reports or addresses to indicate how much he was achieving. The harvest had been poor, and the repressed Kulaks were blamed, but tea production increased, and he visited the famous oil-resources in Baku and explored the tobacco and wine produce areas. In 1934 in a speech to the Seventeenth Party Congress Beria demonstrated his progress; this was an important step for Beria because it marked his advancement to the national stage, and he was elected "to full membership on the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party."²²² Some might argue that Beria was showing a powerful desire for the cause, and he probably did adhere to the Bolshevik foundations, but even

at this stage it seems more likely he was behaving like a puppet on a string wanting to be seen as dancing to the tune of his would-be master Stalin.

At this Seventeenth Congress Stalin had not received the number of votes anticipated but he and his major henchmen “were automatically elected but here was another blow to Stalin’s paranoia and self-esteem, confirming that he rode alone among ‘two-faced double dealers’” and he needed a Beria to resolve his self-obsessive problems.²²³ Beria was his man and Beria was pro-active in promoting the Stalin cult and thereby managed to build his own platform to ensure his own self-aggrandisement. Nearly all dictators have an obsessive need to promote their own image which is why Göbbels was so important to Hitler, and Franco sought the support of the Falangists. Beria ensured Stalin’s picture appeared everywhere and arranged a new monument over Stalin’s birthplace in Gori.* He even went so far in this obsequious behaviour to bring Stalin’s mother to Tbilisi where he and his wife took care of her. When Stalin visited his mother in 1935 it was with her carer Beria.† He was making every conceivable effort to ingratiate himself in the leader’s eyes and behaved “like a courtier looking after a dowager empress.”²²⁴



Beria with Stalin's daughter

* It is curious that Saddam Hussein was born not far away and studied Stalin. Beria’s building was almost a temple.

† When Stalin’s mother died he did not attend the funeral, but Beria and his son took his place, and Stalin may have just felt a twinge of guilt about his lack of attendance.

When Stalin turned his attention to the way recent history had been written, he became aware that he was not always the dominant feature. Beria naturally supported him by attacking historians in his area of influence, to demonstrate that he was ahead even of Moscow in perceiving this so-called problem. He denounced the more objective historians and built up the Stalin cult. Avel Yenukidze mentioned earlier, who had been a close colleague of Stalin, was attacked by Beria with the result he was disgraced and became a victim to the purges. This painful period of the mid-1930s was also the time when Stalin was ridding himself of old revolutionary acquaintances, which also suited Beria's long-term aspirations as he saw himself as their natural successor.

Having challenged the histories of the rise of Bolshevism the time had now come for an official version called *On the History of Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia*, and its true authors remain a mystery to this day, although the work carried Beria's name as the author. It has been implied Kirov had the suggestion of such a writing put to him by Stalin, but when Kirov demurred Stalin turned to Beria. Whether this Kirov scenario has any truth will never be known, but the project launched Beria's image as a serious political thinker; especially as he was deemed to be the sole author. Beria was not the author, he was not an educated historian, and later confessed in his interrogations of 1953 that it was written by several people. On reflection he would not have had time to write such a work. Beria later admitted a man called Bediia along with other contributors had produced the history. (In 1937 under Beria's orders Bediia was shot and it needs little speculation for the motive.) On the other hand, it was not uncommon at that time for "committee-writing" to be followed by a senior name as the author. However, according to one witness Merkulov "Beria didn't do a single bit of work on the book" because to achieve this "he would have to know history."²²⁵ The book was given as a lengthy lecture, published in the press and sold thousands of copies with further editions. "The central apparatus instructed all party organisations to organise study groups on Beria's book, which 'offered the richest material on the role of Stalin as a Supreme leader and theorist of our party.'²²⁶ Beria received all the credit.

To keep him in his place the Politburo reprimanded him for not seeking permission to publish some of Stalin's work, but it was only a warning to act as a caution against too much ambition. As later editions rolled off the press there were significant and instructive changes, not least the fabricated enhancement of Stalin's role in Transcaucasia, suggesting Stalin was deeply involved even though he was attending a Seminary at the time. Stalin was made into the superhero who had foreseen the Menshevik dangers, and it was claimed he had started the famous Baku clandestine printing press. This

led to a web of lies and “in short, Beria’s book, hailed as path-breaking work, transformed Soviet historiography into fiction.”²²⁷ Those who knew the truth such as Bediia would soon learn to keep quiet for fear of execution; as Robert Service noted that Beria had “commissioned and appropriated the text and then shot the writers.”²²⁸ The attacks against old Bolsheviks had been prominent, and Mamia Orakhelashvili had complained to Stalin but to no avail, and very few survived the right of criticism. The book was basically about the Stalin cult and his great career and offering a justification for his repression of the Mensheviks. “There were various Soviet hagiographers competing to portray Stalin as just such a humble man of the people and their instrument of destiny” and Beria picked this up and later enhanced it by depicting Stalin as the Lenin of the Caucasus.²²⁹

The cult of Stalin by the mid-1930s was taken for granted and Beria built up his own cult in Transcaucasia always being careful to make sure he was not challenging Stalin, but depicted as subservient. It was a potentially dangerous self-pursuit, but Beria was shrewd enough to ensure that Stalin was always on his side; it did however encourage his mainly subdued critics to be even more wary of his ascendancy. There were special celebrations in 1936 to celebrate Soviet power in Georgia, and in line with his growing pre-eminence Beria moved to a new apartment at 11 Machabeli Street, and he took over a beautiful villa on the Black Sea not far from Stalin’s dacha. He made much of his time in Georgia and publicised how life had improved in the Communist State. He gave lectures, produced newspaper articles, some buildings and streets were named after him, and his portraits on posters dominated public spaces.

He tended to sing from the same self-serving hymn sheet. He always started his speeches and reports with a reminder of the dreadful Tsarist days which consisted of a “policy of colonisation and Russification, of merciless people’s oppression and exploitation of the enslaved.”²³⁰ He maintained the Tsarist days had been a time “of countless punitive expeditions and exaction of penalties and were accompanied by bestial cruelty and violence.”²³¹ Given his own behaviour it almost defies belief he could speak or write of those days as if they differed from his brutal domination without blushing. After this exercise he would attack the now distant Mensheviks for not providing freedom and ruining the economy.²³² After pages of attacking old and distant enemies he then glorified how much had been achieved by the Bolsheviks in every aspect of life: “the successes of Soviet Georgia are also tremendous as regards the improvement and socialist reconstruction of agriculture.”²³³ He always ensured that he praised Stalin and linked him with the figure of Lenin: “the steadfast realisation of the national policy of Lenin and Stalin ensures that the peoples of Georgia and the Trans-

Caucasus live in staunch friendship and peace.”²³⁴ This and many of his speeches and articles seem today unbelievably hypocritical and mendacious, but they were part of Beria’s cult-building for himself and Stalin, and nobody would dare be critical or amused. Beria was looking to promotion beyond his home borders.

Kirov’s sudden death in some ways marked the beginning of the purges, and as mentioned in the history section of Part One there seemed to be plenty of speculation that Stalin worked with Beria to accomplish this deed. It was a matter of Stalin removing potential troublesome characters. If Kirov had been killed by an angry husband, then it still suited Stalin’s purpose. In terms of the purges Beria, while in Georgia, responded to Stalin and warned as early as 1935 that there would be a check of all party-documents, and by the following year nearly twenty per cent of Party members in Transcaucasia had been expelled, and many arrested. During the mid-1930s Beria would replicate Stalin’s malicious machinations, as a Russian historian wrote: “in Georgia, Lavrenty Beria, the Little Pope, in imitation of the Big Pope, held show trials on the ‘Trotskyists’ in those parts.”²³⁵ It was a huge web of deceit, denunciation and conspiracy and as noted in the history section the first to suffer were the old revolutionaries. The OGPU in 1934 had become the NKVD with increased powers, and it operated at the will of Stalin, who had in 1934 also prepared the way with the “Special Board” which could impose prison sentences by mere administrative methods. In Transcaucasia there were official personnel changes, but Beria’s gang of cronies managed to maintain various positions of importance in the wide-ranging committee-posts.

Beria’s main concern was the drafting of a new constitution in 1936 which meant the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federation, and a degree of diminishment of Beria’s power, as he would only have Georgia within his grasp. “Beria had ruled the three-republic South Caucasus Federation—Stalin’s homeland—like a Persian Shah.”²³⁶ He could not have done this without Stalin’s obvious support, but because of his friendship with his crony Bagirov he could still influence Azerbaidzhan. Armenia was a different problem which was headed by Khandzhian who often criticised Beria.* There were clashes between the two men and in 1936 it was reported that Khandzhian had suddenly killed himself. It was announced he had been suffering from illness, but those Armenians who lived safely abroad voiced their suspicions about his unexpected death. The surrounding circumstances

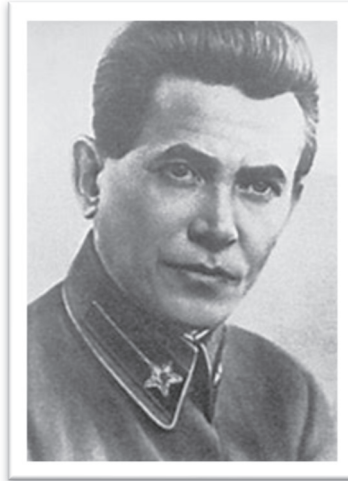
* **Aghasi Khandzhian** (1901-1936) was First Secretary of Communist Party in Armenia. He was a charismatic leader and popular in that area. He was denounced and although his death was a mystery it now seems Beria was involved. After Stalin’s death his reputation was rehabilitated.

were highly suspicious and the evidence years later, when it was safe to raise the issue, seemed to indicate that Beria shot Khandzhian in his office, and then he had the body secreted away and dressed up as suicide. When Stalin had received a telegram from the concerned South Caucasus Party he replied that he considered "it unnecessary to send its own representative to ascertain the circumstances...since in this matter everything is clear and no investigation is required."²³⁷ Malenkov had "stopped off at Tbilisi on his way to Yerevan to concoct a story about the death of Khandzhian, whom Beria had shot, to their mutual satisfaction. The rest of the Armenian leadership was now blamed for the crime."²³⁸ Khandzhian was buried without any ceremony under a concrete block and forgotten. This singular brutal act allowed Beria to launch into the Armenian body-politic.

The same type of mysterious death happened to Nestor Lakoba the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia (part of the Georgian Republic), and as with Khandzhian Beria's involvement was highly likely. He also organised political denunciations against his victims once they were safely dead to ensure he benefitted from their demise. Beria had for a long time contrived for Lakoba's downfall. On one occasion when he and Stalin were guests at Lakoba's house Beria had switched plates with Stalin insinuating that Stalin's portion may have been poisoned.²³⁹ Lakoba was supposed to have died from a heart attack, but he was young and there was no history of illness; there is no doubt that Beria would not have acted without Stalin's endorsement. Stalin had dined with Lakoba and all had seemed well on the surface. However, two months later Beria had invited Lakoba to dine with him, he had refused but Beria's mother insisted, and he obeyed. Following this there was a trip to the theatre when Lakoba felt ill, and he returned to the hotel where he claimed, "that snake Beria has killed me."²⁴⁰ He died that morning at 4.20 am aged only forty-three from a heart attack. Beria pursued his cruelty later by torturing Lakoba's family and drove his widow mad by placing her in a cell with a snake, and by beating her teenage children to death.²⁴¹ Lakoba, unlike many was buried with full honours. "Lakoba's suspicious death, after Khandzhian's suicide, enhanced Beria's mystique and power," and it must have been apparent to all who stood in Beria's way the possible dangers of challenging or not supporting him.²⁴²

The purges had arrived in Transcaucasia and Beria wrote an article in *Pravda* attacking the enemies of the Soviet state, demanding that everyone in the slightest official capacity should be aware of the lurking dangers even within their own ranks. The article almost had an evangelistic tone making it appear that the purges were pure in their intentions. "Beria incarnated the terror-facilitated ascendancy of the NKVD vis-à-vis the party, but he had

achieved that status years before” and would be feared until his final downfall.²⁴³



Yezhov

Shortly after this the NKVD chief Yagoda was replaced by Yezhov to prepare for the major purges and so the persecution of Bukharin mentioned in Part One started. This was a significant moment as Bukharin was of the old school, deemed close to Stalin and was popular. Sadly, for Bukharin, these were the precise features that for Stalin marked him and others like him as condemned. Even Beria's old friend and early mentor Ordzhonikidze recognised he was in danger as his family members and colleagues came under scrutiny. As noted earlier his brother Papulia had been arrested by the NKVD, his younger brother Valiko was in trouble, so Ordzhonikidze turned to Beria for help.* The relationship was somewhat strained during these fraught times but continued out of necessity.† It was clear however that Stalin was moving against Ordzhonikidze who shot himself to avoid the

* Papulia had been arrested under Stalin's orders by Beria, see Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.504

† Such was the growing tension between Ordzhonikidze and Beria that the latter built a special fence between their two dachas and refused to shake Beria's hand, See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.180

inevitable torture that preceded the usual trial and execution. His death was portrayed as another death from a heart attack.

Stalin was at his most efficient in eliminating possible opposition and announced that party officials should not be members of small cabals looking after one another's interests. This was a difficult time for many and even Beria must have wondered whether he would appear in the firing-sights of his master. Beria had his own gang of supporters who were all mutually dependent upon one another. When Stalin ordered new elections, it was an effort to disrupt such cabals, but the vastness of the Soviet Union often meant that the elections remained in the control of the local party men, and Beria and his cohorts survived.

He did not escape notice altogether and an article appeared in *Pravda* critical of the Georgian procedures. Beria had a strong political acumen, he responded with a detailed report to Stalin, and managed to emerge unscathed from potential disaster. Political acumen for some is developed over years, but for Beria it appeared as if it were innate from his youth. Stalin was determined to eliminate opposition and rule by fear, and Beria recognised what was happening by imitating his master. Stalin was probably more driven by paranoia about opposition, but his underling Beria was unquestionably driven by pure ambition. For Stalin the purges were a means to stay in power, but for Beria it was driven by a desire to rise as close to the political throne as possible.

The Russian historian Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko once described Stalin as the "Big Pope" and Beria as the "Little Pope" which contained a cutting truth because Beria responded to Stalin's demand for the purges with his usual alacrity.²⁴⁴ Whether Beria believed the purges were critical or not he followed Stalin's lead without question or hesitation. Beria returned from Moscow in the summer of 1937 and called a meeting of the NKVD and trusted leaders to demand that a search for traitors was to start at once. They were not to hesitate to employ torture as authorised by an instruction by Stalin, which Stalin had pushed through his Central Committee. It was well known that Beria participated in many torture sessions, unlike Stalin and later Himmler in Germany, he did not just organise this brutality, but became involved in its actuality. "Many targets like Eihe were beaten not only in Beria's presence but by Beria himself," and as noted military commanders often referred to *having tea with Beria* as a euphemism for a beating.²⁴⁵ On the occasion Litvinov was under suspicion Yevgeny Gnedin the press officer of foreign affairs recalled how "Beria and Kobulov put me on a chair and sat on either side and punched me in the head, playing 'swings'...they beat me horribly, with the full force of their arms, demanding I give testimony against Litvinov."²⁴⁶ There are plenty of

testimonies of the way that Beria appeared to enjoy his personal involvement in the various devices of torture. Stalin was a distant murderer and took no part in the bloody rituals, he simply ordered the procedures.

The torture was widespread, and most people feared the infliction of pain more than death. History and man's experience have clearly indicated that very few men can withstand torture and will confess to anything demanded of them in the hope of a quick death. From a fear of torture, the more cunning men often implicated as many others as possible believing that the more denunciations they made the better for them. They even implicated those who had indicted them, and nearly everyone they could think of in order to save themselves or make a nonsense of the investigation. This sometimes worked, and when Beria eventually took charge of security in Moscow some were released out of sheer necessity, which gave a false public impression about Beria.

This process of torture led to a series of lies and denunciations which implicated totally innocent people and spread like a rotting web through the fabric of their society. There were very few public trials in Georgia until the torture had ensured that the so-called culprit was not likely to say anything in public and denounce others. Beria was well-aware that torture never led to the truth, and later admitted that it was possible to make anyone say anything: "a person that's beaten will give the kind of confession that the interrogating agents want, will admit that he is an English or American spy or whatever we want."²⁴⁷ Most of the early trials were held *in camera* and the *troika* system, mentioned earlier, was widely employed. This was the three-man justice group which often acted as judge, jury, executioner and torturers, and cases could be started and finished within half an hour or even less.

A prominent Georgian Bolshevik called Mdivani had once opposed Stalin on the Transcaucasian Federation and had appealed to Lenin. Stalin had not forgotten this piece of history, and his destruction was inevitable. He was one of the very few who failed to confess, and his trial was therefore held *in camera*; he was regarded as a ringleader and he and those of his perceived cohorts were taken out of the trial and shot; all in one day. There were countless trials of this nature including Beria's former colleague Kvantaliani mentioned earlier, and Beria and his henchmen used the occasion to eliminate their own opponents including Bediia who was probably the true author of Beria's so-called book. He was just one of countless numbers who passed through the hands of the notorious NKVD *troika* system and was shot on December 2nd, 1937. Beria also attacked the intelligentsia, especially writers. Initially he had encouraged their contributions only to demand a series of articles in praise of Stalin and

himself. Beria, for reasons beyond explanation had the habit of killing those who had responded to his demands, possibly because they knew too much.²⁴⁸ Even in the field of music a young and talented orchestra conductor called Evgenii Mikeladze with his children were tortured by a *troika* which included Beria. It transpired that the unfortunate Mikeladze was married to the daughter of Mamia Orakhelashvili; the whole family was made to suffer. Lakoba's wife and mother were rounded up, and all his associates; no one was safe. Georgia's population was about 3.4 million and only about two per cent of the Soviet totality, but about nine per cent of these were victims.²⁴⁹ It was just as appalling in the Ukraine because this brutality was widespread.

Beria made sure that as far as Stalin was concerned, he was obeying the letter of the law; the law was a matter of Stalin's will. Bagirov survived but probably because of Beria's efforts. Another survivor was Khrushchev in the Ukraine who had "developed a reputation for bootlicking," and was a good deal shrewder than Beria, to Beria's eventual misfortune.²⁵⁰ In Beria's final days it would be Khrushchev who would bring him down, but in these earlier times Khrushchev admitted "after the first encounter with Beria, I got closer to him...I liked Beria—a simple sharp-witted person."²⁵¹ Beria was sharp-witted, but never simple.

On reading the various individual accounts of sadistic torture it defies belief as to where such cruelty arose from. It could be argued that what Stalin demanded he achieved, and the same question can be asked of Nazi behaviour in Germany and in many other countries. The question does not go away with the answer that men like Beria obeyed their masters unflinchingly, but in the pursuit of their own ambitions they must have become dehumanised and bereft of any human feeling. Any answer to this question is probably unachievable but will be explored in Parts Three and Four.

Stalin succeeded in what he demanded which was the elimination of the old Bolsheviks and the slightest perceived opposition he detected however tenuous. He would allow no popularity amongst his underlings, no men with memories of Stalin's past, and he ensured he was the one singular man at the top of the food-chain. The numbers killed will never be known in detail. During the great purges of the mid-1930s Beria himself "reported that over 12,000 had been arrested and more than half of them convicted," this would have been music to Stalin's ears.²⁵² Over the Soviet Union more than 1.7 million people were arrested in 1937-39, the population of the GULAG increased by 600,000 inmates, but under the leadership of the "new people's commissar, Lavrenty Beria, conducted the same work in the same tenacious

and systematic manner. True, its methods became more secretive, and hence more sinister.”²⁵³

Beria at this stage had Stalin's total trust and confidence. A Grigory Gofman, the Soviet Commissar for health, suddenly announced in the June 1937 Central Committee plenum in Moscow, that Beria had worked for the Musavat and was therefore a British spy, it came as a shock that someone would dare announce this criticism. There was silence and quite why he suddenly made this announcement is lost in the mists of time. He must have known that even if there had been truth in this repetitious claim Beria had been officially exonerated. Stalin called for a break, allowed no discussion and Gofman was expelled from the party and arrested the next day. Gofman received “ten years without the right of correspondence, which meant he had been executed.”²⁵⁴ Beria had powerful backing from Stalin and not until after Stalin's death was the Musavat spy charge mentioned again by Khrushchev.

In Beria's areas of responsibility there was a vast array of different nationalities in Georgia; as noted Beria was Mingrelian amongst Abkhazians, Svans, Adzharians, Imeretians, and Lezgians; it was an area divided on many issues, not least tribal affiliations. Stalin was intent on wiping out the Party cadres of Georgia and he entrusted this to Beria. Beria had responded to his master's voice, he and his cohorts survived, and used Stalin's sanctions as an opportunity to eliminate their own enemies and build a personal power-base. Beria ensured his grip in multitudinous areas and most leaders who were not close to Beria, such as Bagirov simply disappeared. Those who had once enjoyed supremacy had gone, and after the elections the results were self-evident. Control of life even in faraway Republics such as Transcaucasia changed, and the old powers had become centralised in Moscow. The purges produced a real sense of fear and men like the NKVD chief Yezhov in Moscow ruled for Stalin as his means of government by sheer terror. Beria was more fortunate than most because he straddled both the all-powerful NKVD scene and the political arena.

Nevertheless, it was not plain-sailing for Beria in so far that in late 1938 his name was not given the prominence he wanted, he found himself criticised for not following some protocols, and his cohort Sumbatov-Topuridze head of the Azerbaidzhan NKVD was removed by Yezhov and replaced by Yezhov's own man. For a moment the political life appeared to turn against Beria when he heard from his faithful servant, Goglidze, the Georgian NKVD chief, that Yezhov was planning a move against him by trying to implicate him in an ongoing military-fascist plot. It was rumoured that Beria was fleeing, but it transpired only as far as Moscow to defend his cause with Stalin.

Stalin's daughter once described Beria as "a magnificent modern specimen of the artful courtier, the embodiment of oriental perfidy, flattery and hypocrisy," and despite Stalin's paranoia this seemed to work for Beria even with a man of Stalin's suspicious nature.²⁵⁵ He arrived before Stalin and explained his situation and, being an astute political animal, gained the backup of Lazar Kaganovich who, also like Beria, had discovered that Yezhov was investigating him.*

Stalin in his usual slow but determined fashion decided that Yezhov's day for retirement was approaching. He decided a special commission would investigate the NKVD and appointed Molotov, Malenkov, Vyshinsky and Beria to the task.[†] It was decided that "honest men" were required, and "an honest people's commissar was needed. On a motion by Kaganovich, Beria was appointed to the post of first deputy of the NKVD."²⁵⁶ Stalin then informed Yezhov he needed a deputy and asked his advice; Yezhov could not think of any person, but he had be cautious of what was happening, and when Stalin suggested Beria he had little choice but agree and pretend it was an excellent idea. Not that Yezhov wanted Beria alongside him, as Robert Service wrote: "daily collaboration with Beria was like being tied in a sack with a wild beast."²⁵⁷ There is little doubt that in Stalin's mind Yezhov was finished, and Beria would replace him "to cause the leader himself to shine more brightly," as Solzhenitsyn cynically noted, later writing that "in any case, Stalin had to remain innocent, his sacred vestments angelically pure."²⁵⁸

* **Lazar Kaganovich** (1893-1991) who, during this period, was the People's Commissar of Heavy Industry. He was a staunch and brutal stalwart of Stalin and was sometimes known as "Iron Lazar."

† **Andrey Vyshinsky** (1883-1954) was a politician, jurist and diplomat. In 1935 he was the Procurator General of the USSR and headed up Stalin's Moscow trials and attended Nuremberg. From 1948 to 1953 he was Foreign Minister. He died in New York.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOSCOW

According to Vsevolod Merkulov who was obliged to write about Beria's life after his arrest in 1953, Beria was unhappy about his appointment to Moscow, and Khrushchev held the same opinion.²⁵⁹ Beria had reputedly said to Khrushchev "what are you congratulating me for? You yourself did not want to be Molotov's deputy... I also did not want to transfer to Moscow, I'd be better off in Georgia."²⁶⁰ There was always the possibility that Stalin needed his puppet Beria closer to home because he was aware that Beria had been building up his own cult in Georgia. The chief of the Union of Soviet Writers, Fadeyev had informed Stalin that a bust of Beria stood in the main public square, and he described the habit of Congress members who stood up every time Beria entered their proceedings.²⁶¹ In addition to this Stalin was well-aware of the number of letters of complaint Beria frequently wrote on economic matters regarding his home territory. Beria had demanded extra allocations of grain and flour, complained when hydroelectric equipment had not arrived from Leningrad, and demanded more industrial goods. Beria may well have missed the adulation he received, genuine or otherwise in his home country, and Stalin may have wanted him relocated for the same reason. It has also been suggested that Stalin wanted a Georgian close to him, a Party man of the same ethnic background. However, it seems more likely that Stalin recognised in Beria a tool for his devious machinations, and it also appears somewhat implausible given that Beria was ambitious, and always wanted to be closer to Stalin's power, that he would have been unhappy with this call to the highest echelons.

Whatever the devious machinations in the summer of 1938 Stalin transferred Beria to Moscow as Yezhov's first deputy of the NKVD. This was undoubtedly in preparation for Yezhov's dismissal on December 8th, by which time effective power had easily passed to Beria. Stalin had watched Beria over the years and his servant had achieved precisely what Stalin needed; "Beria had crushed not just the Georgian Mensheviks but also the Georgian Bolsheviks," all those of whom Stalin had become suspicious.²⁶² Unquestionably Stalin's decision was based on his sudden wish "to purge

the ranks of the secret police and wind down the Great Terror;" Stalin was possibly sensitive to the growing powers of his own policing structures.²⁶³

In the Georgian newspaper *Zaria vostoka* it was simply announced that Beria had been relieved of his post because of his transfer to Moscow. Stalin rejected Beria's suggestion for his replacement in Georgia probably because he was suspicious of cabals, but in the long run Beria cunningly re-established his own political hold in that area. It was a matter of careful manipulation; during Stalin's life-time this custom of wanting one's own men was always dangerous; this was Stalin's personal habit, but it was not intended for others. In Moscow it appeared on the surface that Beria and Yezhov worked well and socialised together. It was not to last as the Commission's report arrived denouncing the work of the NKVD especially during the purges. Yezhov was attacked from every possible angle and this was assisted by the scandals that surrounded his reputation. "There were homosexual affairs, bisexual orgies, bouts of heavy drinking and fantastic stories that his wife was an English spy."²⁶⁴ There was some truth amongst these stories, but even if Yezhov had been clean-living Stalin had decided his subordinate's policing role had finished.* In his biography of Stalin Robert Service suggests working with Beria was the source of his sexual misconduct, but at the very best it seems that working with Beria may have enhanced it somewhat.²⁶⁵

"Yezhov's dismissal enabled Stalin to make him the scapegoat for such excesses of the Yezhovshchina [purges] as could be publicly admitted."²⁶⁶ "Executing the NKVD chief could throw into doubt the mass arrests and executions," but it also helped put Stalin in a better light as if this had happened without his knowledge; he was after all a man of the people.²⁶⁷ The Commission also advised that the purges came to a halt. It was clear that Stalin had slowly realised that it had to stop soon, and he was able through this Commission to shift the responsibility from himself.[†] It was the end for Yezhov who had no alternative but offer his resignation and watch as Beria took his place. Yezhov had been aware that he was in danger and was "distracted with fear and foreboding that he started shooting prisoners who might incriminate him."²⁶⁸ Beria was just as cruel but more cunning. When Yezhov's apartment was searched apart from bottles of vodka and

* "Yezhov characterised his homosexual liaisons as 'mutually' active. How much of this Beria embellished cannot be known; history does not record the prudish Stalin's reaction." Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.620

[†] Because Yezhov was the driving force behind the major purges, (which Stalin needed to divert his own image from these appalling times), the term *Yezhovshchina* was thereafter used to describe the purges.

bullets with names on them, it was claimed he held records of Stalin in the period prior to 1917. Whether this was true or fabricated cannot be verified.*



Beria's supreme image

Stalin cultivated Beria on his arrival in Moscow going out of his way to make him feel welcome. He was given better accommodation and was granted a two-story detached mansion. This had been “the former residence of General Alexei Kuropatkin, war minister during the Russo-Japanese War fiasco, at Little Nikitskaya Street” [now the home of the Tunisian Embassy since 1958] and his dacha replaced by a more splendid one.²⁶⁹ In 1937 when the purges were in full swing Stalin had told Beria “an enemy of the People is not the only one who does sabotage but one who doubts the rightness of the Party line. And there are a lot of them, and we must liquidate them.”²⁷⁰ He self-evidently trusted Beria who reacted in a clever and calculated fashion. He was relatively new to Moscow, but he watched and waited to obey Stalin’s command.

Stalin’s daughter noted that “Beria’s pince-nez was already gleaming in a corner somewhere, thought he was still humble and inconspicuous, everyone in the family loathed him and felt a premonition of fear.”²⁷¹

* Amongst the papers discovered in Yezhov’s apartment were incriminating pieces of evidence against Malenkov and it has been suggested that Beria and Malenkov formed their alliance from this time. The discovered papers disappeared into Beria’s rooms. See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.263 and p.263fn

Stalin's daughter was accurate in her attitude towards Beria and her family, because "letting Beria into the family was like locking a fox in a chicken coop, but Stalin shared responsibility for their fates."²⁷² Beria even flirted with some of Stalin's relations, but despite their protests to Stalin he never paid any attention. Any family members who had some form of connection with Yezhov were in danger. Beria, and often with Malenkov, would listen to the family and then dripped information into Stalin's ear who then demanded they acted against any family conspirators. Zhenya Alliluyeva's husband Pavel, an apparent innocent suffered a suspicious death at the same time as his associates were arrested; medical murder was becoming popular amongst Beria's henchmen, not least because it gave some form of legitimate explanation, though this fooled no-one.* Zhenya lived in fear of both Stalin and Beria, even though Stalin took a fancy towards her and suggested she move in with him. In the end she married a Jewish engineer whom she had met in Germany. Stalin had no evident compassion towards his relatives. He treated the wives of his victims in the same vein; he assumed they had supported their husbands and the children suffered as well. He always showed an interest in the wives of his henchmen whose survival depended on their husband's standing at any given time. Beria understood these revolting policies often making sure Stalin was suspicious of everyone except himself.

Beria made sure that anyone associated with Yezhov was purged. He carefully replaced them with his own cohorts, though he had to be intensely sensitive to Stalin's watchful eye who warned him that too many Georgians would be inappropriate. Stalin never trusted any form of cabal, and to play safe it is alleged (by Merkulov) that Beria had to return some of his appointees.[†] Beria, in the process of cleansing Yezhov's men even wanted Blokhin killed; he was the actual executioner. Stalin refused pointing out that the Party needed a man like that to do the dirty work. He was the type of man Stalin needed from behind his desk who could be ordered to pull the trigger. Through this generated political culture Stalin ensured "he had many more senior willing executioners, who spoke and thought like thugs," and Beria had become his prime asset.²⁷³ As far as is known Stalin ordered thousands upon thousands of deaths, but he tried to keep his distance as far as the public were aware.

Beria was in a slightly stronger position than his predecessor chiefs of the NKVD because unlike them he was also a politician as well as a policeman. In this position he was able to form the NKVD organisation into

* Zhenya Alliluyev was Stalin's lover in 1934.

[†] Merkulov had always been one of Beria's cohorts, but in the Khrushchev purge of 1953 he was obliged to co-operate.

a powerful if not elite body within the State. Stalin undoubtedly allowed this to happen because above all he needed such a body for the security of his supremacy, and Beria could expand his power with occasional warnings from Stalin, and he did so until after the Second World War. As with all his minions, and as with Genghis Khan, Stalin would often warn them they were never safe. Using this technique, he warned Beria there was a question over his reliability when in 1919 it had been suggested he had been spying against the Bolsheviks. Merkulov was sent to Baku to find the papers relating to this time which appeased Stalin because it was not raised again. He worked hard in his new post, made the NKVD offices efficient, and from the public perspective the purges seemed to be a thing of the past; it was sometimes known as the "Beria thaw."²⁷⁴

There was almost a sense of relief at Beria's appointment; "We were overjoyed by the appearance of this pure and ideal figure, as Beria appeared to us, remembers Mark Laskin, who hoped like many people, that all the innocents would now be released, leaving only the real spies and enemies in jail."²⁷⁵ It was of course untrue, some were released but the purges and torture continued, but the victims were more carefully selected, and there were no major pronouncements in the newspapers as had been the case hitherto. During the early months of 1939 Beria presided over the "executions of 413 important prisoners, including Marshal Yegorov and ex-Politburo members, Kosier, Postyshev and Chubar," the last of these whose dacha was already inhabited by Beria.²⁷⁶ Even the professional assassin Sudoplatov wrote "we hoped that the appointment of Beria as Yezhov's deputy in July 1938 might correct the evident mistakes, Naturally, [he later reflected] we were naïve, since we sincerely believed in the decency and honesty of our leaders."²⁷⁷

It has been claimed that whereas Yezhov was crude and out control, Beria was coldly efficient. Yezhov had instilled terror, but Beria made the system more effective, and in time the fear of the police and the state grew extensively. The influence of the NKVD developed at a political level and Beria, along with Merkulov, achieved the status of being elected to the candidate membership in the Politburo.²⁷⁸ Once again Stalin made sure that Beria was aware of his superiority by not giving him the top rank which was not achieved until January 1941. Beria told his political colleagues he had removed the sense of frenzy from his predecessor's reign, but that was his way of making his mark in the new post; he and the NKVD would do anything that Stalin required as many would discover in time. "In general, Beria consolidated and institutionalised the system. From the Yezhovshchina, he developed, rather than an emergency operation against the people, a permanent method of rule."²⁷⁹ On the surface there may have been some

hope that times were changing, but it was only an upgrading of personnel, although the “frantic atmosphere of the Great Terror had been dissipated but Stalin’s state remained a murderous madhouse—and most of the leading madmen were confirmed in power.”²⁸⁰

The labour camps (GULAG) had grown and people walked in fear of the sudden arrival of the NKVD. The Gulag population appeared to have peaked in 1938, and “837,000 detainees were released from camps and colonies following a re-examination of their cases under Beria’s authority during a ‘rectification campaign’ ordered by Stalin. In 1939, however, the repression resumed afresh and on 1st January 1940 the number of inmates of camps and colonies reached 1,979,729, most of them common-law prisoners.”²⁸¹ After the brief pause previously noted as the “Beria thaw” it was apparent to the more discerning that Beria was only making the system more efficient, not more reasonable.

These camps were well-known but rarely discussed, and occasionally when they were mentioned silence was demanded, as in the same vein that the nature of brutal interrogation should not be publicised. “To avoid this, Beria wrote to Stalin and Molotov on 7th December 1939 to say that defence lawyers and witnesses should not be admitted during the preliminary investigations (instigated to review illegal proceedings), ‘in order to prevent disclosure of the way in which these investigations are conducted.’”²⁸² Unlike Yezhov, Beria’s approach was not less sensitive, but more clandestine and thereby in many ways more sinister. There is little doubt that Beria was always operating under Stalin’s directions, as by this time every person in any position of power was compelled to react from sheer fear. These operatives were all “trained in the traditions of Stalinist obedience to the Party line, they were a docile group of functionaries, quick to bend their principles when they sensed a shift of power at the top.”²⁸³ Whenever Beria or any other party leader announced a change of direction the politically sensitive politicians and all other functionaries would know that this must have emanated from the very top.

The camps were part of the NKVD’s economic empire (this was the same feature later in Nazi Germany when Himmler tried to turn the concentration camps to economic purposes) whereas originally, they were regarded as a better way of life than detention in prison cells. It has been argued that at times the conditions were less rigorous than detention “with the exception of those that held political prisoners, notably on the Solovki Islands on the White Sea, which was the sole camp under the jurisdiction of the GPU.”²⁸⁴ The NKVD under Beria became more interested in playing a role in the country’s industrialisation and transformed the camps into a

major work sector. This was the original meaning of Gulag (*Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitelno-truovyykh lagerei*) or General Camp Directorate.

The first NKVD showpiece had been in constructing the White Sea Canal launched in 1931-32 dedicated to the workers and their overseers, the secret police.* The dedication was a farce because “the systematic exploitation of convict labour would also build the symbols of heroic modernity by which the regime would present itself;” the White Sea Canal was a major example, but “all these came together to produce mass death on a previous unimaginable scale.”²⁸⁵ There were other major tasks such as the construction of railways (in the Trans-Baikal region), a series of canals, one connecting Moscow and Volga, plus a myriad of factories and saw-mills. Stalin had a special obsession with what he called the *Great Transformation of Nature*, which was basically seeing natural resources as free and not expendable. Russia’s timber was cut down without thought (Russia accounted for more than fifth of the planet’s timber resources) and this policy was later continued by Khrushchev and Brezhnev so that an area the size of France became a swamp, and the Aral Sea’s sources were diverted for industrial purposes and became a toxic salt desert.²⁸⁶ In building the two hundred mile Great Fergana Canal to move water to cotton fields was another propaganda feat which was based on slave labour, and was the last nail in the coffin for the Aral Sea. In Beria’s time all the required labour was provided by the Gulag camps and their slave labour. In 1940 Beria, with an NKVD report to Stalin, indicated the Gulag system more than paid for itself; Beria as with Himmler in Germany was recognising the economic value of slave labour.²⁸⁷

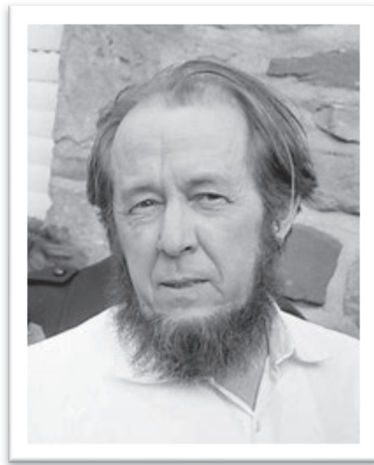
Had it not been for the outbreak of war the system would have continued enlarging, but postwar this industrial agency blossomed again. Beria wrote a report on the Gulags to Molotov in 1940 and according to this report “the camp labour force, employed in constructing enormous factories, railways, port facilities and ‘special sites’ (for defence needs), or logging and producing timber for export, was not used to the full because the inmates were fed too little and clothed too badly to face the difficult climatic conditions.”²⁸⁸ This was stated in a report but the reality is now known to have been horrendous. The camps were far-flung and remote, criminality amongst the inmates was rife because of the need for survival, but the remoteness meant the camp administration was equally corrupt as each constituted its own little empire. Beria for some time had shown an interest

* The White Sea Canal was economically worthless, built in record time it was not deep enough and cost thousands of lives. See Ings Simon, *Stalin and the Scientists* (London; Faber & Faber, 2017) p.431

in economics, and he may have been proficient, but he knew his master Stalin was worried about the economic future.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOLZHENITSYN AND REALITY



Solzhenitsyn

In his book on the *12 Rules for Life* Jordan Peterson makes the point that to ward off despair which is endemic to humanity people should treat the world personally, but if treated too objectively there remains a distance.²⁸⁹ In other words if one is asked to think about a prisoner's life in the third person, the result is not so galvanising when it is done in the first person; in other words study the situation as if *I am the prisoner*. Solzhenitsyn in his book on *The Gulag Archipelago* takes the reader inside the mind and daily conditions of the Gulag prisoner at a deeply personal level. The book is not a novel but a serious historical reconstruction. "For a few decades the word *Holocaust* has served us well as a shorthand term for modern man's inhumanity to man. In recent years a second such shorthand has entered our working vocabulary: *Gulag*. This term comes to us not from a host of witnesses but from one lone man."²⁹⁰

Solzhenitsyn was such a prisoner and described the camps in exacting detail, and this chapter notes what Solzhenitsyn had to say, simply because it brings home the ghastly reality of what Stalin and his henchman Beria imposed upon ordinary innocent Russians and other nationals.

Solzhenitsyn described the devastating news a person felt when arrested because the consequences were already well-known, and the deep sense of loneliness for an individual; “your world is shattered,” and you are very much on your own. Following the arrest there was often a search of the prisoner’s premises which was always ruthless in looking for incriminating evidence. Solzhenitsyn related the account of a railway engineer called Inoshin. In his rooms was a small coffin containing the body of his recently dead child. The body was tipped out of the coffin and searched before being tossed back on the floor.²⁹¹ Family would be told, if they were not arrested at the same time, that there was no right of correspondence which meant for most that the victim was executed. Solzhenitsyn referred to the officials who carried out these arrests as the “*organs*” and they would devise various ways of rounding up their victims, ranging from straightforward arrests to trickery and pretended friendliness. They almost appeared to enjoy the different methods they deployed.

The officials had been given quotas to provide the necessary slave labour and eliminate anyone who might just have the slightest element of criticism about the State. “By and large, the *Organs* had no profound reason for their choice of whom to arrest and whom not to arrest. They merely had over-all assignments, quotas for a specific number of arrests.”²⁹² Solzhenitsyn described throughout his work the various reasons given for an arrest, and the examples he provided throughout his book causes the modern-day reader to catch his breath. He described how a group of young girls collected a few grains of wheat and receive twenty years for being “an organised gang;” a shepherd swearing at his “collectivised” cow; children fighting in a playground who knocked down a government notice; a fourteen year old child, Lida, picking lost gain up from the path, and another young girl called Iruna Tuchinskaya who was arrested leaving church on the grounds that she had been praying for the death of Stalin.²⁹³

Later Russian soldiers and civilians who had been captured by the Germans were frequently arrested because they were supposed to have been traitors, when the real reason was that they had seen too much of Western European life, and they might be in danger of talking about what they had seen. In the years that touched Solzhenitsyn he listed other reasons for the many arrests; they ranged from spying to praising American technology, democracy, or Toadyism towards the West. It had been established in Article 12 of the Criminal Code of 1926 that children from the age of twelve

could be arrested, but when whole families were arrested even younger ones left for the camps. Solzhenitsyn was naturally cynical about the whole *raison d'être*, pointing out the old Russian proverb that a “stone is not a human being, and even stones get crushed.” He looked back to the days of the Tsars remarking on the differences to the past, pointing out that Lenin’s brother had been executed for trying to kill Alexander III, but Lenin himself had been allowed to study law at university, adding that “no Genghis Khan ever destroyed so many peasants as our glorious *Organs*, under the leadership of the Party.”²⁹⁴

Solzhenitsyn wrote in excruciating detail about the methods of interrogation listing the different means, including the nature of torture during such sessions. Few people would have predicted that during this time “that prisoners would have their skulls squeezed within iron rings, that a human being would be lowered into an acid bath; that they would be trussed up naked to be bitten by ants and bedbugs; that a ramrod heated over a primus stove would be thrust up their anal canal; that a man’s genitals would be slowly crushed beneath the toe of a jackboot.”²⁹⁵ None of this had occurred during previous Russian history, and even Peter the Great may only have used this type of torture against ten or twenty people. Over some four pages Solzhenitsyn lists thirty detailed means ranging from the psychological to outright torture to encourage innocent people to confess to crimes they had never committed. As they awaited their moment of dreaded interrogation they were crammed into small cells, often ten feet by ten feet thirty at a time. Solzhenitsyn reminds his readers that it was impossible to imagine all this unless one had been there, comparing the situation in trying to explain to a medieval peasant the speed of a jet plane.

The dangerous transit to the remote camps in the frozen north, often resulted in many deaths and killings on the way. After the interrogation these deadly camps gathered some appeal for those under sentence. The camps were remote, and any escape was unlikely given the wide-spread freezing regions of these multitudinous but distant places where these camps existed. There were a few specialised camps for scientists and technicians in case they were needed, and TONs which were Special Purpose Prisons for long-term prisoners, were intended to isolate potential rebels. Most were labour camps where death was slowly administered by brutal hard work, long hours, appalling rations and the climate. The camp inmates called three weeks at logging “*dry execution*,” and even as the weather improved life remained tenuous.²⁹⁶ *Katorga* is hard labour, and in the February Revolution it was abolished, but as Solzhenitsyn noted, Stalin reintroduced it; “in the Gulag tradition murder was protracted, so that the doomed would suffer longer and put a little more work in before they died.”²⁹⁷ Random killing

frequently happened and Solzhenitsyn described the time a guard thought someone was about to break rank, so he “opened fire and killed five prisoners, he was put in detention for fifteen days (in a warm guardhouse, of course).”²⁹⁸

“At the end of the workday there were corpses left on the work site. The snow powdered their faces. One of them was hunched over beneath an overturned wheelbarrow, he had hidden his hands in his sleeves and frozen to death in that position.”²⁹⁹ “Multitudes of ‘goners,’ unable to walk by themselves, were dragged to work on sledges by other ‘goners’ who had not as yet become so weak. Those who lagged behind were beaten with clubs and torn by dogs. Working in 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, they were forbidden to build fires and warm themselves.”³⁰⁰ Solzhenitsyn described in consuming detail the effects of hunger and how it becomes the core of one’s thinking, the effects on women trapped under these circumstances and at the mercy of the *trustees*. He was especially touched by the plight of the young girls and wondered at some of the religious inmates: “they died—most certainly, but they were not corrupted.”³⁰¹ Solzhenitsyn persistently pointed out that his account cannot be believed unless a person experienced it, but his work managed to convey the sense of ruthless barbarity the prisoners suffered which was imposed by Stalin and his henchmen. Solzhenitsyn cynically noted, that for Stalin’s purpose, “the camps were a wonderful place into which to herd millions as a form of intimidation.” According to Solzhenitsyn the camps lived off constant fear, servitude, secrecy and mistrust, universal ignorance, and squealing; betrayal was a form of existence, corruption, and lies were all a means of staying alive, as was cruelty and slave psychology.

However, the West remained ignorant of this absolute wicked cruelty until Solzhenitsyn’s work was published. Stalin and men like Beria ensured that the outside world received only their version of the “goodliness” and the reformatory nature of hard labour. Marx himself had noted that hard labour was good for the criminal, but as Solzhenitsyn noted, Marx had never picked up an axe or pick in his lifetime. The Nazi concentration and labour camps have had a considerable wealth of literature and history written about them, but the Soviet system remains somewhat hidden to this day. Solzhenitsyn was always astounded at the ignorance of the West and even more so at their ignorance of what happened to prisoners who were dutifully returned to Stalin, the West not understanding the ramifications even as late as 1973.³⁰²

Stalin and his cohorts made sure the rest of the world heard only what they wanted them to hear. In 1929 Gorky had visited the camps which were suddenly organised to look healthy, and the prisoners forced to appear

grateful. Solzhenitsyn related how one brave boy told him all the facts and was shot when Gorky left, and Gorky's article claimed that "it was nonsense to frighten people with Solovki, and that prisoners lived remarkably well there and were being well reformed."*

In 1934 the State Publishing House produced a book called *The White Sea-Baltic Stalin Canal* which was an extension of the Gorky project *Histories of Factories and Plants*. "The collective authors do not simply keep silent about the deaths on the Belomor Canal during the construction... they write directly that *no one* died during construction," they wrote that criminals (who are being reformed) are the result of the repulsive conditions of former times.³⁰³ In *Life* magazine it was reported that a Supreme Court Judge in New York had paid a similar "organised" visit, and he had written that "in serving out his term of punishment the prisoner retains a feeling of dignity," to which Solzhenitsyn replied "how much you have harmed us in your vain passions to shine with understanding in areas where you did not grasp a lousy thing!"³⁰⁴

It is difficult even now (as Solzhenitsyn constantly warned his readers) to understand the gross inhumanity and evil of these camps, but his work conveyed some of the impact that men like Stalin and Beria had imposed on their own citizens and peoples of other nations. It is not difficult to use the word "evil" when it comes to the Holocaust and the gas-chambers, and the Gulag system although different in some ways, was an evil which Solzhenitsyn graphically brought to the world's attention.

* The Solovki camp was set up in 1923, an island in the White Sea. It was remote and inaccessible and was used as a place of detention for political opponents. At first these prisoners had a special status, but under Stalin they became labour (death) camps. The camps system policy evolved from the Solovki camp.

CHAPTER SIX

BERIA: THE MAN

Beria arrived in Moscow in 1938 as the main purges in Russia were finishing, and he gave the appearance of calming the horror down as previously noted, but Beria was no moderate. He was obsessed with following his master's orders including the execution of Trotsky. The fact that Trotsky was still alive at this time was surprising; he had "been sentenced to execution *in absentia* at the first Moscow public trial (August 1936), but the attempts to have him killed probably dated back to 1929 in Turkey."³⁰⁵ Beria was clever at organising executions from a distance even if they were in foreign lands. He frequently organised deaths in overseas territories. On one occasion he called for an NKVD officer called Bokov and asked him if he could kill with a single blow. When the answer was affirmative, he was sent to the Middle East to kill an ambassador whom it was rumoured was about to defect. One blow from an iron bar and the mission was accomplished. When the ambassador's wife asked about the whereabouts of her missing husband, she was told he had been recalled to Moscow, and she and the children were given arrangements to return, but it transpired only as far as a prison camp for enemies of the state.

It was in the same fashion that Beria, through his main agent Sudoplatov, had organised for a Ramón Mercader (his code name was *mother*) to eliminate Trotsky.* As Stalin was wily in organising his personal henchmen, Beria as noted, used the same methods, and his choice of Sudoplatov was astute. Sudoplatov was a natural secret agent (an illegal) and had first met Ramón Mercader during his devious machinations in the Spanish Civil War, and he later trained him for this task which had obsessed Stalin for years.³⁰⁶ There had been a machine gun attack on Trotsky's enclosure which had failed, but Mercader was cunningly trained to gain Trotsky's trust, and he

* Stalin was overjoyed at the news of Trotsky's death, and Beria was pleased that his agents had proved more successful than Yezhov's men. Trotsky, Stalin claimed, was the victim of his own intrigues.

infiltrated himself into Trotsky's study. Mercader used the ice-pick in the infamous murder, but unlike Bokov one blow was not enough, Trotsky had time to bite the assailant's hand and lived for another twenty-four hours. Mercader spent the next twenty years in prison and "kept the Stalinist faith throughout his years."³⁰⁷ There was simply nothing to which Beria objected if the order came from Stalin.* If it meant putting innocent women and children into prison camps it was arranged without hesitation. If murder were ordered it was carried out like a railway clerk issuing a ticket. Stalin had perceptively seen in Beria a man who would be his obedient servant and do all that was required without equivocation. Beria also recognised Stalin needed him, but he was clever enough always to pander to Stalin at every given opportunity. Later, during the war, when Stalin was taking an American diplomat to a bomb shelter Beria was there waiting, and he took Stalin by the arm to lead him to safety, only to be met by the response "Get away from me coward."³⁰⁸ Stalin was always rude, he often baited Khrushchev and Malenkov for their flabbiness, and Bulganin's beard always amused him.³⁰⁹ He often laughed at Beria for not wearing a tie which he rarely did, probably because Stalin never wore one.† A man like Beria would never have allowed such incidents to dissuade him from his life-long habit of being in the right place at every opportunity to show his care and obsequious support of the master.‡

Every dictator or tyrant needs such men, and already in Germany Göbbels and Himmler were carrying out the same function for Hitler, which is why they are better known because Nazi history is widely read, whereas Beria was later expunged from the Russian records. Beria was a deeply suspicious man, like Stalin, and at one stage he even suspected that the infamous Cambridge spies in England were working for the British or the Germans.³¹⁰ Although when Donald Maclean in March 1942 sent news of the atomic research Beria took this on board and passed the information to Stalin. He trusted very few and the feeling was always mutual. It was

* It was not until 1969 when Sudoplatov met Mercader at the Union of Writers Club in Moscow that he learned the details of this event. See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.77

† When Sudoplatov first met Beria, he recalled he was not wearing a tie. Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.39

‡ Sudoplatov noted that Beria himself was always rude to high-ranking officials but polite to those of a lesser rank. See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.113

apparent to many that Beria looked after his own interests and Sudoplatov's perceptive Jewish wife Emma (also an agent) warned him "that there was something 'evil' about Beria and that he was a man without feeling."³¹¹ Even though Sudoplatov was his trusted servant he and his wife always suspected their apartment was bugged with a listening device.

There were many reasons why Beria was removed from Russian memory apart from the political machinations in the post-Stalin era. His personal moral depravity was widely known, as he had women and young girls taken from the streets for his own personal gratification. How far he was a sadistic rapist and the level of his debauchery will never be known, but there seems little question that there was considerable veracity in these claims. His bodyguard Sarsikov gave the number of assaulted women as thirty-nine, another bodyguard called Nadaraia spoke of these habits, and American diplomats living nearby were aware of the women coming and going from his home.* Beria's name occurs in many personal reminiscences such as Tatiana Okunevskaja an actress who claimed that Beria raped her repeatedly in 1947.³¹² Even at Stalin's death it proved difficult to find Beria because it was rumoured he was with some woman.³¹³ Beria later referred to them as his mistresses, but during his lifetime his sexual predatory nature was well-known. Later, during and after his downfall, hundreds of women came forward claiming how he had raped or abused them in a way which was simply horrific. There are countless stories of how he would cruise the streets while his bodyguards jumped from his car and select a candidate for his evening's entertainment. It has been suggested that this was embroidered and enhanced to muddy his reputation after his downfall, but the evidence is too widespread and consistent to be brushed aside as mere exaggeration. The evidence of witnesses is extensive and "reveals a sexual predator who used his power to indulge himself in obsessive depravity."³¹⁴ Moreover "these women were just the tip of a degenerate iceberg."³¹⁵ Had he remained an ordinary everyday citizen his sexual appetite may well have been governed by local social limitations; but his power as the police chief and politician allowed him to carry through his evil acts to a "mind-boggling" and gross level of debauchery.[†]

His family always denied these rumours, his wife believing the women were his agents, but his son Sergo admitted his father had a child by another

* On this subject see Knight Amy, *Beria Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: University Press, 1993) p.97

† Even now "Beria's illegitimate children are well known among Moscow and Tbilisi society...including a highly respected Georgian Member of Parliament." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.450fn

woman.* Later his marriage with Nina had been under strain because his then mistress, Lilya Drozhdova had given birth to a daughter and shared the same cot with Sergo's baby; this was the time Nina built her own residence in Sukhumi. The denials were probably based on the need for family unity. Göbbels was also an infamous sexual predator, but the general rumours of the day seemed to indicate that Beria was barbaric and ruthless with his sexual appetite, which is frequently a sign of corrupt personal power.

His public reputation, as noted earlier appeared good, especially after the much feared Yezhov. His photographs and images with his characteristic pince-nez glasses gave him an academic and gentle image raising the hopes of many. This image changed as his reputation developed a menacing aspect. The human tendency in looking at a photograph is coloured by knowledge of the person or similar looking people. "What does a murderer look like?" is a commonly asked question, but once a person's true nature is revealed the photographic image of a person psychologically distorts according to his known reputation. "The appointment of Beria is usually taken as a convenient date to mark the end of the Great Purge. Of Beria!—that is, of a man whose name, even in official Soviet circles, is now the very embodiment of terror and torture. And yet there is some sense in the convention."³¹⁶ The apparent calming down of the purges helped Stalin to avoid any sense of public responsibility for the outrages.

Beria was socially able to adapt swiftly to new situations because of his ambition, and he quickly made comrades from men such as Mikoyan, Molotov and Voroshilov. He drank and socialised with those whom he deemed important, and this was especially true whenever he was in the company of Stalin. He had the advantage over others because it was possible for Beria and Stalin to converse in the alien language of Georgia. Stalin, as noted, used dinner-parties and drunkenness to keep an eye on his minions as they revealed themselves through alcohol; in this life-long habit he found in Beria the ideal colleague as Beria used the same crafty techniques.[†] Stalin even tried this later at international level but found his match with Churchill; such habits are not confined to politicians. Beria found himself an ideal

* Sergo became well educated, gained a doctorate in physical mathematics and married Maxim Gorky's granddaughter.

† Beria could drink with the best of them and often used his caustic wit to upbraid others about their habits, body shapes, lack of forethought and so forth. This would have pleased Stalin but not his guests. It has also been noted Beria "in common with other human predators became a vegetarian, eating 'grass' and Georgian dishes but only rarely meat." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.447 and p.448

dacha outside Moscow, which had once belonged to a former chairman of Sovnarkom, who was arrested during the purges.

Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva described in detail Beria's habits of target shooting, his enjoyment of films, sport, and his overall comfortable life-style.³¹⁷ In all her writings Stalin's daughter exhibits a deep and understandable hatred of Beria, but as a youngster she used to call him "Uncle Lara."³¹⁸ It was not just shooting at targets, but Beria enjoyed photography, volleyball, and swimming and "Beria attracted everyone back then by his inner power, his ineffable magnetism, the charisma of his personality" undoubtedly following Stalin's early habits of gathering his own cohorts.³¹⁹ Beria was the epitome of the "new class" of the privileged, walking the corridors of power, living in comfort beyond the imagination of the average citizen, but always appearing in public dressed in such a way as not to invoke the image of wealth.*

His work with the NKVD took much of his time and having cleansed the body-politic of Yezhov and his cronies, he turned his attention to the ongoing investigation and the trials of the so-called Military-Fascist Centre, which included Chubar the previous owner of his dacha. By the end of 1938 Yezhov's "leadership group in the NKVD had almost been purged...about 150 of his followers were shot."³²⁰

Beria always followed Stalin's instructions or listened to what he was hinting, but he also pursued some personal vendettas. One was against the Komsomol First Secretary called Kosarev who had, according to Beria's informants suggested in a toast that Beria was not the best of leaders. Beria's personal interest went so far as to prompt him to attend the arrest, and when Kosarev's wife protested he ordered her to be taken prisoner as well. This was all part of the Military-Fascist plot, and when the interrogators failed to find convincing evidence the trial was held *in camera*. His predecessor Yezhov had virtually wiped out the military command and its officers, but Beria pursued the remnants and took a personal interest in the interrogation of Marshal Bliukher, even including the man's helpless wife. The list of men subjected to Beria's brutal interrogation techniques was innumerable, but it included many from the arts and the general intelligentsia, including scientists. He deviated from his Lubyanka tradition at one stage to establish an NKVD entertainment group for song and dance to entertain troops

* In his youth he played for Georgia's football team and practised ju-jitsu. See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.68

fighting in the Finnish war, but it was politics and policing which dominated his time.*



Litvinov

In 1939 it was abundantly clear that Europe stood on the precipice of war, Beria's attention was drawn away from the parochial developments which had held his attention for nearly two decades, and he took an active interest in foreign affairs. This was initially directed by Stalin who, in his usual pattern, decided to purge the NKID (People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs) which he considered necessary in the light of foreign tensions. It was probably based on Stalin's vexation at not being able to establish any viable agreement with the Western democracies of Britain and France. These negotiations had been conducted by Litvinov (who had an English wife; he was Jewish and anti-Nazi), but Stalin was beginning to wonder whether the safest route was a negotiation with Germany for which purpose Litvinov was not the man. Rather than just drop him Litvinov was given another post, but he found his foreign affairs' offices overrun by

* The Lubyanka and the Foreign Commissariat (which Beria would soon dominate) were very close together and they were nicknamed "the Neighbours." The name Lubyanka still instils a sense of fear. Even Solzhenitsyn confessed to confusing the two buildings. Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.12

Beria's NKVD, before he was eventually transferred to another new position. Many of his underlings were interrogated, but they found no incriminating evidence, and although Molotov took over the reins Litvinov survived. This was unusual and various speculations have been raised; the least likely was that Stalin was worried about his international image, the most likely was Litvinov was reliable, intelligent, and would be of use in another situation as these fraught times developed.* Litvinov who had worked so hard at collective security was rapidly displaced by Molotov but survived. It had been a difficult and tenuous time for Litvinov who found that he had not only lost his Moscow apartment, but that Beria had surrounded his dacha with NKVD troops. His phones were tapped but he managed to contact Beria who jovially replied that "the goons were stationed there for his protection."³²¹ Beria's very involvement must have been disturbing for Litvinov. In the aftermath it was Molotov who worked with Ribbentrop on the Soviet-German pact with its hidden protocols regarding potential areas of influence in Europe.

The result of Stalin and Beria's machinations was that the NKVD moved into the Foreign Office of the NKID, and like a virus controlled anything of importance. Beria had brought one of his special henchmen with him, a man called Vladimir Georgievich Dekanozov, who was already infamous for his bloody behaviour during the purges. He was promoted to head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (INO) and passed on information, which was entirely false about British connivance, and a purge on possible Western sympathisers began. "At the very moment when the NKVD's foreign intelligence was at its least reliable, its influence on Soviet foreign policy was simultaneously at its peak."³²² It was a serious problem because the very diplomats who were best versed in the West, were subject to Beria's suspicions. To the day that Barbarossa started Stalin and Beria persisted in their belief the capitalists were stirring up trouble. As troops built up in on the western borders Stalin later told Marshal Timoshenko "we are starting a panic for nothing."³²³ Whatever mistakes and blunders Stalin was making he always had the unstinting support of his faithful and ruthlessly ambitious servant Beria.

* As it was Litvinov became the Soviet Ambassador to the USA.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1939 ALLIANCE WITH HITLER

After the purges not only had Stalin deprived the Soviet Union of many critical military men and foreign agents, but he emerged if anything more confident and more paranoid: “a state of mind that made him, if anything, less equipped to analyse the dangerous international situation.”³²⁴ He had never been astute in the nature of foreign countries and had concentrated his energies on cleansing, as he would have called it, the home front of traitors.

However, as Germany invaded Poland Stalin moved in to take his agreed share and Beria worked closely with Stalin on all these matters. There were huge numbers of prisoners to be held, and in the Baltic States and in Poland it was decided there had to be population adjustments, with the need to move any potential intelligentsia or political leaders to the east. “There were three deportations, in February, April, and June 1940. The operations were meticulously organised. In February, for example, one hundred trains took away the equivalent of a large city’s population in a matter of hours.”³²⁵ Documents clearly indicated this was Stalin’s policy which was carried out by Beria. “We learn from a secret letter Beria wrote to the TsK [central committee of the All-Union Communist Party] in September 1940 that, under a resolution of the SNK [Council of People’s Commissars] dated 10th April of that year, members of twenty-five thousand Polish families—old people, women and children—were exiled from the new western oblasts [regions] of Ukraine and Belorussia. All they were guilty of was that their men had served in the Polish army or the state apparatus, or had been classified as bourgeois—landowning, counterrevolutionary elements.”³²⁶ As Himmler would try in the west to move populations for political and racial reasons, Stalin and Beria proved even more adept at this inhumane behaviour. Ordinary people were of no consequence and any intelligent person or local leader was considered a danger.

The most notorious situation arose over Polish prisoners captured during the brief war in Poland; some were freed, some sent to Gulag camps, but it was becoming evident that some 15,000 were unaccounted for. Later in 1943 the Germans uncovered the site of the Katyń massacres where the bodies of Polish officers and intelligentsia were unearthed, and because they

still had their uniforms and personal details, they were easily identifiable to the delight of German propaganda. No one in the western world wanted to believe this, there were suspicions, but it was not until the breakdown of the Soviet Union that it was admitted as one of Stalin's crimes carried out by Beria's NKVD troops. There were sites other than Katyń, but these massacres were basically carried out by the Kharkov NKVD under Beria's orders. It was Beria who had informed Stalin of the perceived danger, and he signed the orders along with Molotov and Mikoyan. Stalin did not want Beria as a member of the troika and changed Beria for Kobulov for some reason, but speculatively because Beria had too much on his plate.³²⁷ It was Stalin's decision based on his paranoid fear that these Polish citizens might cause a revolt, but it was Beria and his henchmen who suggested and committed the deed. It has sometimes been proposed that this was entirely Stalin's initiative, but a letter from Beria to Stalin clearly outlines that it was Beria's suggestion to eliminate what he perceived to be potential enemies.³²⁸ In the words of the historian Bob Moore "the failure to convert them and other members of the Polish intelligentsia to a pro-Soviet attitude led directly to an order by Lavrenty Beria on 5th March 1940, for their execution and the mass murder of up to 22,000 victims in the forest of Katyń and two other sites."³²⁹

As mentioned earlier Beria was equally concerned about population movement in the Baltic States as this area was being Sovietised. As in most cases the actual numbers will never be known, but it has been estimated that the operations started in the spring of 1941 and about 140,000 Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were taken into the Soviet Union, and about 400,000 Poles were sent to the labour camps.³³⁰

The labour camps were important to Beria who saw them as an economic benefit, he even increased food supplies to make them more efficient, but it is now known that the conditions remained inhumane and barbaric. It is generally believed that there were a million and half inmates ranging from labour camps, corrective camps, and even colonies for juveniles. When the full blast of war started their conditions deteriorated even further. There were some important prisoners who would be needed when war started, including scientists and engineers. Perhaps the most astonishing and infamous example would be the aeroplane designer Tupolev, arrested by Yezhov in 1937, but transferred to a place just outside Moscow in case he was needed. He was evidently indispensable, and he demanded his own release; this request was granted the moment the Germans invaded.

Tupolev was one of many important scientists including Sergei Korolev a rocket pioneer. Korolev was imprisoned in 1936 for six years in Kolyman camp, but later he headed the rocket research and in the 1950s and 1960s

helped pioneer the sputnik investigation, and the famous orbital flight of Yuri Gagarin in 1961. It has been argued that had it not been for his untimely death in 1966 Russia may have had a man on the moon before America; and Beria held this scientific and technical genius in a labour camp. It was Beria who arranged the *sharashka* (special prisons) probably prompted by the scientists who rather than be imprisoned pointed out they could use their talents for the state.³³¹ Beria's personal powers were widespread and were in the ascendancy, and in early 1941 he became deputy chairman of the USSR Council of People's Commissars which was the most important state body.

As Hitler prepared to invade Russia, as noted in the history section, Stalin still appeared to trust the German leader, ignoring Richard Sorge his brilliant spy and Churchill, and insisted that the capitalist states were trying to activate a war between Germany and Russia. Beria and Stalin decided to find any colleagues who thought otherwise and who were therefore deemed to be colluding with the capitalists.³³² The NKVD and the NKID had considerable information about the build-up of German forces on the western borders, and Dekanozov, now the Soviet Ambassador in Germany, communicated Hitler's intentions. Molotov was also highly aware of the situation because Dekanozov spoke to him directly, and he relayed this to Stalin who regarded it as mere disinformation. Beria also knew the facts and was worried about an attack in the Caucasus oil fields. It amounted to a curious problem because such was the fear of Stalin no one wanted to disagree with him or even suggest he was wrong or upset him. Although it has been noted that Beria told Stalin that the Germans were at a high state of readiness on June 2nd,³³³

The purge years of the mid-1930s had instilled a fear in the hearts and minds of his cohorts that made the possible invasion of the Nazi war machine the lesser risk. Beria went so far as to accuse the head of military intelligence, Golikov, of being a liar even though his own information backed Golikov's observations. It was all a gigantic blunder but "the war they had inadvertently helped to promote brought them new rewards, promotions, and prestige."³³⁴

CHAPTER EIGHT

BARBAROSSA TO 1945

As previously mentioned there has been considerable historical curiosity as to Stalin's reaction on the news of Barbarossa. He had ignored the warning signs as already noted, refusing to accept their validity. Even so he had ordered that the borders should be defended and gave the task to Beria and the NKVD.* He made an incredible blunder given the lack of time by demanding that the new western borders be fortified, while the traditional ones were to be demolished for materials. This was unquestionably Stalin's decision, but Beria having no military insight of his own followed his master's command to the letter. Even when his own men had warned Beria of the gathering onslaught, he must have realised the enormity of the imminent danger, but as always persisted in supporting Stalin's views even when they were self-evidently mistaken. However, it is worth noting that Sudoplatov is less critical of Beria here, but on the other hand Sudoplatov was rarely in the company of Beria and Stalin together, when Beria would be agreeing with everything. Sudoplatov blamed the Soviet intelligence for not estimating the power of the German forces, and for being too reliant on the fact that it was generally believed that the Germans could not sustain a long war; the NKVD and GRU were too "preoccupied with political intentions."³⁵ In believing the Germans could not sustain a prolonged war they were correct, but after Barbarossa this hope could have gone badly wrong.

When the military complained about the situation they were again ignored. Three times communist German soldiers had crossed the lines to warn the Russians, but Stalin simply viewed this as a German ruse to provoke the Russians into provocation; it was matter of total self-delusion.[†]

* The NKVD was growing in power and weapons, but for Stalin this body represented the power of the Party over the growing military.

† The third deserter was Alfred Liskov who swam the River Pruth, but Stalin's own response was to order his execution for sowing disinformation. "Even on such a night, it was impossible to break the Stalinist routine of brutality." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.317

The preparations for the defence line, even simple anti-tanks ditches were not even half-finished when the onslaught started. Although Beria used camp-labour there was insufficient time for such a major task. They also increased their errors by building new air-fields too quickly and too close to the border, which meant the aircraft were in easy reach of the Luftwaffe, and when positioned on their airfields their planes were left neatly lined up for instant destruction. Perhaps the greatest blunder was allowing German reconnaissance to fly deep into Soviet territory for fear of provoking a German reaction.*

Kesselring, who led the initial air-attack, recorded his disbelief of “Stalin’s unbelievable trust in Hitler which greatly assisted Kesselring’s Luftwaffe attack; Stalin had issued an order that restricted flying over German territory so that the Russian bomber force (which had largely escaped the first Luftwaffe strike, owing to its bases being farther from the front) took off obediently in accordance with an already outdated operational plan. Over 500 were shot down.”³³⁶ In a biography of Kesselring it was noted that “Kesselring had flown his FW-189 over the projected war-zone to familiarise himself with the territory, to see the gathering of German forces, and in his memoirs confesses that it was incredulous that Stalin would not believe all his informants.”³³⁷ Beria had forbidden his troops or any military to fire on intruding German planes in Soviet air-space prior to the invasion, and although Beria was later denounced as a traitor in the Soviet history of the war, he was following Stalin’s orders which he always did without question or hesitation.³³⁸

Beria had in fact warned Stalin on June 12th writing that “in a few instances they [the German aircraft] had penetrated 60 miles or more in the direction of military installations and large troop concentrations.”³³⁹ Stalin appeared paralysed and decided not to blink in case it provoked the Germans. It is impossible to understand Stalin’s thought processes, but he must have believed that Hitler had accomplished all he wished, and the war was finished as far as Germany’s expectations were concerned. Stalin knew that Hitler’s troops had taken Scandinavia, France, they were in the Balkans and Britain had retreated. He occupied many east-European countries and Italy was paying obeisance, but at least Stalin had a non-aggression pact and the happy memory that Napoleon had failed in 1812. Stalin would not permit any combat preparation and Beria’s men ensured there was no aggression on the Russian front to provide an excuse for German over-

* According to Sudoplatov a German Junkers 52 landed in May 1941 unannounced and undetected. This led to several executions. See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.121

reaction. Hitler would be guilty of underestimating Russia, but Stalin had failed to grasp the machinations of Hitler's mind. Within hours of the attack the results were devastating, and in days huge tracks of Soviet territory and personnel were in the hands of the Germans. Even as the initial attack started, and Timoshenko had ordered Zhukov to phone Stalin about the heavy shelling, "like a schoolboy rejecting proof of simple arithmetic, Stalin disbelieved his ears. Breathing heavily, he grunted to Zhukov that no counter-measures should be taken."³⁴⁰

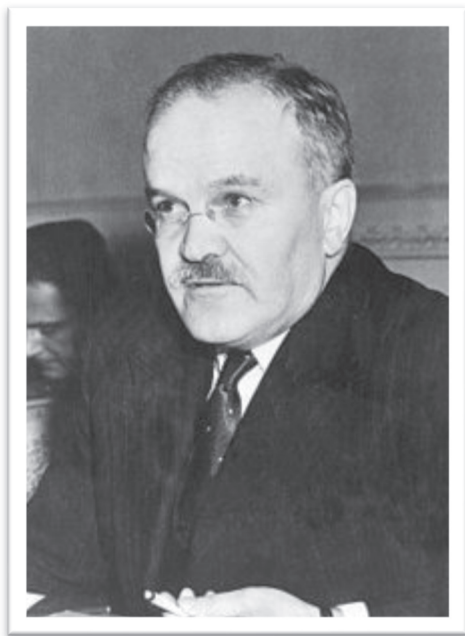
Such was the shock for Stalin that for years it was suggested, as noted in the history section, that he had a nervous breakdown, disappeared into his own world and hid in his dacha scared of arrest. Sudoplatov in his memoirs denied this entirely, claiming there was a calm approach to the crisis.³⁴¹ This was not entirely true, but it now appears that during these initial days Stalin was busy consulting with his military, the Party leaders, and especially Beria who appeared to be constantly alongside him. However, these stories concerning Stalin's behaviour may hold some substance in that he appeared to fall into a deep despair believing his credibility as a leader had been destroyed. It has also been suggested that Stalin staged this scenario, a "pose successfully employed from Achilles and Alexander the Great to Ivan" to test possible opposition, causing Beria to note that "Mikoyan had been right to hide" having stood outside the visiting group at the very back during their visit to Stalin's dacha.³⁴²

As the news of the initial overwhelming German success came through Stalin had hurried to the Kremlin at 5.30 am summoning Beria, Timoshenko, Zhukov and Mekhlis. He ordered Molotov to make the radio broadcast to the nation about the invasion, and disappeared into his dacha, probably wondering whether he would be arrested, or possibly making plans; the truth is evasive.* He was pursued by Beria, Kaganovich, Molotov, and Voroshilov who convinced him he was needed. The four, along with Mikoyan and Nikolai Voznesensky, went to Stalin's dacha on the evening of June 30th.† When he saw them, as noted, "he expected they were there for his arrest."³⁴³ There seems little doubt that he was in a deep state of

* He may well have chosen Molotov because he was the man who had arranged the Soviet-German Pact with Ribbentrop.

† **Nikolai Voznesensky** (1903-1950) was an economic planner overseeing Gosplan (State Planning Committee) and Deputy Premier in May 1940. He clashed with Stalin over economics but was hated by Beria as a possible contender for Stalin's favour. Later Beria would inform Stalin that Voznesensky was failing to produce enough guns and was given his job. Later Voznesensky found himself caught up in the Leningrad Affair and was tried and executed on the same day in 1950. His reputation was rehabilitated in 1954.

depression as news percolated through of the continuous onslaught of the Germans. He became fixated, as was typical of his personality, with finding out the traitors who had allowed this to happen, even though it was his blunder and miscalculations which were the root cause. It had been Stalin who had opposed sound advice which had left the Soviets so appallingly under-prepared. The visiting group had agreed that Molotov should take Stalin's place if they found him unable to be himself, but had Stalin found out "it could have been the death of all of them."³⁴⁴



Molotov

Few in 1941 would have guessed or thought that Stalin rather than encourage the defence of Moscow and Leningrad was seeking a peace negotiation with Hitler. When Zhukov was later summoned into Stalin's presence, he found him ensconced with Beria and discovered that both men were thoroughly convinced of imminent defeat. Stalin explained the situation as being one of disaster and talked of Lenin's decision at Brest-Litovsk. The relationship with Zhukov was never going to be easy, as Zhukov on one occasion had said to Stalin "Comrade Stalin, have we permission to get on with our work?"³⁴⁵ Beria shocked at this approach to

Stalin rebuked him in Beria's fashion and Stalin, silent for a moment after this dressing down, warned Zhukov the Party opinion was important.

It was in Zhukov's presence Stalin instructed Beria to seek an early peace settlement with Hitler, even knowing and acknowledging that it would probably mean losing the Baltic States. Beria then asked Sudoplatov (his trusted henchman) to approach the Bulgarian ambassador in Moscow called Ivan Stamenov to act as an intermediary.* Contrary to some historical accounts he agreed "but his overtures to the Germans were brushed aside."³⁴⁶ Others claimed the Bulgarian never made the effort, telling Sudoplatov that even if the "Russians had to retreat to the Urals you will win in the end."³⁴⁷ This effort was made a second time on October 7th but again to no avail. It was clear Stalin "felt less than confident about the Red Army's defensive capabilities."³⁴⁸

The necessary administration for war became essential and the creation was soon announced of *Stavka*, the General Headquarters of the Soviet High Command. Attached to this military command headed by Marshal Timoshenko were some civilian advisers, notably Beria. Stalin remained in charge, and in addition to this a five-man State Defence Committee (GKO), a supposed war cabinet and its members could sit in on *Stavka* meetings. It was believed that it was Beria who came up with the idea of a New State Committee of Defence (GKO) which would streamline the bureaucracy.

The war consolidated Beria's power, and in July 1941 the NKGB was reabsorbed into the NKVD and Beria had become the most powerful security chief in Soviet history. His powers during these years would grow exponentially. It transpired that some 140 intelligence officers had been imprisoned during the purges, a list supplied by Sudoplatov and all but three (already executed) were released without question to help in the coming crisis on Beria's orders. Sudoplatov noted that "Beria did not question the guilt or innocence of the people I recommended; he only asked, are you sure we need them?"³⁴⁹

After a few days' inactivity Stalin devoted all his attention to the war and the international scene leaving Beria and Malenkov responsible for

* **Pavel Sudoplatov** was an Intelligence agent and specialist in assassination. He was recognised as a specialist in overseas killing and later managed the death of Trotsky. He became one of the "principal puppeteers of the Kremlin's *danses macabres*." He was a Ukrainian miller's son who had served as a cypher clerk with the Red Army and had spent time for the regime in the Spanish Civil War. After Beria's death he was imprisoned and survived as an embittered man but eventually wrote his memoirs: *Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, Special Tasks The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994). See Hastings Max, *The Secret War* (London: William Collins, 2105) pp.18-21

domestic affairs. Beria's hard-line administration organised the removal of essential heavy industry to the east beyond the Urals which proved important during the war years. He was responsible for internal security, drawing on the resources of the Gulag system, in charge of troop movements and equipment to the front, and for foreign intelligence. As his American biographer wrote Beria "like other members of the leadership threw himself into his tasks with the energy of desperation, motivated not so much by his patriotism as by self-interest and fear. He could ill-afford a Nazi victory over his country."³⁵⁰ As unpleasant a man as he was Beria was intelligent and a clever organiser. People worked for him out of fear and the need to resist the Germans.

One of Beria's "most cynical ruses was carried out in August 1941" when NKVD agents disguised as German parachutists were dropped into the Volga area to test the loyalty of the citizens; those who helped were killed and eventually the whole population was transported to Siberia and Kazakhstan.³⁵¹ The method of moving populations and so called "traitors" was barbaric and many died during the journey: "the Germans and the Soviets used exactly the same methods to deport huge numbers of people: a few minutes to pack some necessities before being shipped off in cattle wagons to an unknown fate."³⁵²

Beria was indefatigable in his pursuit of making sure tasks were completed and ensured that he was more effective than Stalin's other cohorts. "No industry was too complex or vast for Beria to master: he was in many ways not only the Himmler of Stalin's entourage but also the Speer, another architect."³⁵³

From Stalin's point of view Beria's role as the Himmler policeman of the Red Army was of major importance. Stalin's habitual paranoid suspicion made him constantly mistrust his leading commanders, and Beria also had a similar attitude towards the military. It was quite extraordinary, given what was happening in the German invasion that Beria continued his purge of the high command looking for so-called traitors.

The war did not stop the reign of terror, and Russian POWs who returned were to suffer the fate of the postwar returnees and found themselves interrogated as potential spies, and they were then sent to labour camps. A General Meretskov had been arrested in the early months and was tortured by Merkulov under Beria's orders. It was noted "that brutal continuous torture was applied to Meretskov by high-ranking officials...he was beaten by rubber rods until he was covered in blood."³⁵⁴ Beria almost redoubled the sense of terror. Stalin also ordered the scorched earth policy and Beria, even as Moscow was threatened, reported that 638,000 men had been detained, and 505 deserters shot; a deserter was often defined by being in

the wrong area which is easily done under battle circumstances. Stalin had hesitated about fleeing Moscow as the Germans drew near. Preparations were made to evacuate everyone to Kuibyshev (the old city of Samara on the Volga) and families and many others went, but Stalin was hesitant and eventually followed Zhukov's advice that the Germans could be halted. Before their anticipated departure Stalin had informed Beria and Shcherbakov that they would have to stay to organise the underground resistance. How effective Beria would have been in this role is debatable; he was a man of violence and a "control freak," but he had never been involved in hand to hand combat or had any military battle experience. The Stalin regime had been badly prepared and there were no bomb shelters in the Kremlin, and Beria was left with the task of dynamiting any facilities that the Germans might use.

During the night of 15th to 16th of October the NKVD had moved its essential systems to Kuybyshev along with their prisoners. There was not enough transport so three hundred were simply shot. As hundreds of high-ranking officers sat in prison their junior officers were at the front trying to hold the line.³⁵⁵

Stalin's mind was impenetrable, and he suddenly came up with the idea of holding the traditional military parade even while Moscow was under attack; he could not be dissuaded. The fraught public were gathered, and the display took place with the Politburo nervously huddled on top of the Mausoleum. Beria sent his reliable henchman Sudoplatov to a position where he could warn them if a German air attack started, but this was unlikely because the weather conditions were so appalling.³⁵⁶ Tanks and soldiers passed by in what to many, given the extreme circumstances, must have seemed somewhat bizarre. The Germans at this stage were only fifty miles away, but the November parade had to happen because Stalin needed to be seen by the people as in control. As it happened despite his request for two more armies and 2,000 tanks Zhukov fought the Germans to a standstill on December 5th having lost some 150,000 men in three weeks; the figures were simply staggering. As startling as this parade was Sudoplatov believed it encouraged people to believe everything was under control: "The parade strengthened our belief in the defence of Moscow and our inevitable victory."³⁵⁷

Stalin soon elevated himself to the status of the ultimate military commander, but during the war his constant dabbling in military affairs often created havoc and human disaster. It later led to his refusal to evacuate Kiev, despite the advice of field commanders, and hence the loss of over half a million prisoners in September 1941, and "after Order 227 in August 1942 he decreed 'not a step back,' and General Vasily Chuikov, defending

Stalingrad, shot an estimated 13,500 of his own men to stiffen morale.”³⁵⁸ The statistics are revealing. Four out of every five German fatalities occurred on the Eastern Front. Germany had 80 million people and the Soviet Empire 171 million; Germany had 208 divisions in 1941; 167 at full strength and 146 deployed to attack Russia.³⁵⁹

The barbarity remained widespread. Some Germans lived on the border regions within Soviet territory, and it was rumoured that they had welcomed the German army “Stalin lashed out and told Beria ‘to get rid of the lot.’”³⁶⁰ War can be a ruthless and barbaric exercise and men like Stalin and Beria only increased the suffering of their population and their own soldiers. Stalin instructed Beria to instil the strictest discipline and back it with punitive action when necessary. As early as July 16th the system of political commissars was given the right to share the command with the military. A few days later he had ordered that military units should be purged of unreliable elements, and by this he was not inferring military inability but political reliability.

Even those men who escaped German clutches were to be investigated by the NKVD and its special OO units (Osobyie Otdely) who checked for political security and military counterintelligence. On July 25th these OO units rounded up a thousand so-called deserters and shot the majority; these were men who had escaped the overwhelming German forces and could have fought again. Some senior officers were shot including the mentioned General Pavlov who had been the commander of the Western Front when Barbarossa started. Beria, on Stalin’s orders, eliminated men who had fought and escaped against appalling odds, Stalin turned them into scapegoats for his own failure of allowing Germany to attack an unprepared Soviet Union, even though Stalin had ignored the early warnings time and time again.



Abakumov

Solzhenitsyn related later how many innocent soldiers had been shot and imprisoned on these ridiculous orders. Stalin gave the orders, Beria executed these orders through his Chief of this Special Department by a man called Viktor Abakumov, who was notorious for his brutality.* This man Abakumov and Beria were distrusted and feared by the military as was Abakumov's deputy Ryumin. They interfered in military matters which was often a disaster. Abakumov's rise to power was noted by Sudoplatov when he wrote that Abakumov "went from being a subordinate of Beria's to be a rival," even in a war-crisis Beria was watching his own career.³⁶¹

Beria had plenty of experience at interrogation and political machinations, but he had never had any war or military experience. In October 1941 two Soviet pilots had seen German columns advancing towards Moscow but when the military sent warning of this invaluable sighting Beria demanded photographs and instructed everyone that it was merely war-mongering and unnecessary provocation. This almost defies belief that he could assume this attitude and indicated a military naivety which was to become a characteristic of his conduct as a quasi-military man.

Time and time again Beria used threats to gain control over the military and they in turn not only appealed to Stalin to stop this interference, but they developed a distinctive animosity towards him. In the light of later study about this life and death conflict in the Nazi-Soviet conflagration, it now seems extraordinary that politicians and mere interrogators should have been given such authority in battlefield situations. Even when it came to the invaluable allocation of weapons in those dangerous days, Beria was always seeking to arm his troops who were only rear-guard and security men, at the expense of frontline troops. Beria managed to clash with the top men, including military commanders such as Voronov and even Zhukov. When Voronov had brought Beria's allocation of rifles to Stalin's attention Beria was beside himself with rage, and as they left the presence of their lord and master Beria whispered to Voronov "'just you wait,' he hissed, 'we'll fix your guts.' Voronov hoped this was an 'Oriental joke.' It was not."³⁶² Beria and Stalin both disliked Zhukov especially as this man soon became popular with his victories. As noted earlier, at the end of the war Zhukov was shifted out of the limelight by Stalin because of trumped up insinuations from Beria, concerning Zhukov's trustworthiness. "Having tea with Beria" was often

* **Viktor Abakumov** (1908-1954) was later Head of SMERSH, 1943-1946, then Minister of State Security, 1946 -1951; he fell out of Stalin's favour over the Doctors' Plot, survived Stalin but was executed in 1954. "Abakumov remains the most shadowy of Stalin's secret-police bosses...many atrocities were Abakumov's doing, not Beria's, even though most histories blame the latter." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.477

used as a cynical quip by military leaders who suffered Beria's threats and sometimes beatings. On one occasion Beria fed false information about German incursions and to contradict Beria was dangerous. As to why Beria should do this can only be answered by the possibility that he was intent on appearing essential, and that he held special intelligence. He did the same to impress Stalin over his sudden knowledge of Hess's well-known flight to Britain, suggesting a Western connivance which was patently untrue. It simply served his own ambitions and ego to make him appear master of all intelligence.

As it happened sheer necessity brought about by the German incursion and threat of winning lessened the NKVD's influence. Stalin appeared to recognise that if Russia were to survive, the military had to be trusted more than hitherto. Beria concentrated his efforts on gleaning intelligence about the enemy, and when Moscow appeared under direct threat the NKVD was evacuated to Kuibyshev, although the GKO remained in Moscow after assurances by Zhukov that the line could be held.

The parts played by Beria in intelligence work and behind the enemy lines were nevertheless, important. He used his man Sudoplatov and others like him for sabotage, information gathering, and he formed an Administration for Special Tasks in July 1941 to carry out these activities which he oversaw. He had a Special-Purpose Brigade with a force of more than twenty thousand men and women. Intelligence radio officers were sent behind the lines, and in his memoirs Sudoplatov wrote of over 212 guerrilla detachments with some 7,000 men in the rear of the enemy.³⁶³ Sudoplatov estimated that with these detachments some staggering 137,000 Germans were killed, 87 high-ranking officers and numberless collaborators were eliminated. Later, under the name *Operation Monastery*, Beria's intelligence components managed to place disinformation and create a degree of havoc in the German Abwehr.

There was a sense of understandable panic as the possible invasion of Moscow appeared imminent. Beria panicked as well and ordered the evacuation of all who could not fight, and the need to distribute food.³⁶⁴ Stalin watched his cohorts who wavered between optimism and defeatism, but when he spoke all had to listen. Beria moved his office from the Lubyanka to Dzerzhinsky Street into the basement next to an air-raid shelter. Beria was also made responsible with others for a scorched-earth policy of any industrial plants left where there was a possibility of German occupation. Industries which were sent eastward were sometimes moved back when the German offensive was halted, but such was the disruption that war production took time to recover.

Beria was technically responsible for armament production, but the actual work was done by Ustinov and a man called Vannikov; Beria at the very best was the overseer who would apply the pressure. He had so many responsibilities and posts it is impossible to believe he worked at this essential task at a personal level; he was in many instances just the frightening title-holder who managed others. This amount of work was becoming an emerging problem for Beria, and the NKVD was too large and widespread. Within the armaments production Beria ensured his own NKVD troops received weapons, and it was rumoured that anyone working within that vital industry walked in terror of him. Beria was not a military man nor was he an engineer, but it was the fear of him which made him a driving force. His major contribution also had another negative aspect because his organisation supplied the slave-labour from the Gulag camps for coal mines, timber, to heavy industry. The camp conditions from all reports were appalling and the number of deaths from overwork and lack of food and sleep will never be known, but it was in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. Beria was even questioned about the working conditions, but human suffering was never part of his equation.

In the spring of 1942 the NKVD formed yet another unit responsible for guarding the rear, catching spies and deserters and any other form of traitor. They also took on the task of guarding POWs and became garrison troops in those areas which the Germans had left. The men of the NKVD found they could receive orders from their own superiors and from the Red Army. This dual control naturally led to considerable conflict.

Beria as an individual tended to stay well-clear of any frontline appearances with a couple of exceptions which have been bolstered beyond what happened for self-propaganda reasons. In the summer of 1942 he visited the Transcaucasian front on Stalin's orders as a member of Stavka, as the Germans were advancing. Beria was accompanied by Sudoplatov, now a commissar of state security and lieutenant-general. They were later reprimanded by Stalin for being too close to the front line (if that were true) because he needed his spymasters close to home.³⁶⁵ Sudoplatov accompanied Beria as they oversaw specially trained mountain troops try to block German advances over the high passes.³⁶⁶ Sudoplatov in his memoirs paints a slightly different picture of Beria which may contain some elements of truth.

Stalin was naturally suspicious of the reaction of the local people, especially the Muslims who had been courted by the Germans, and Beria himself as a Mingrelian was suspicious of the Muslim population.* Stalin

* Himmler in fact created an SS Division from some Muslim areas where there was no love for Stalin and his brand of communism.

was especially worried about the oilfields demanding of his henchmen that they would lose the heads if the oil fell into German hands, but they would also lose their heads if they destroyed the facilities too early. Beria's main task according to some historians was "to stamp out the embers of treason among the ethnic groups," along with more pertinent duties.³⁶⁷ Later in the early 1950s when Beria was still in favour with Stalin it was announced that Beria had led the defence. The truth was that he was only there for a few weeks at the most, and he stayed safely away from frontline action.

The military, when they felt safe to express themselves, had a vastly different perspective of a Beria bullying his way around, interfering in military decisions, and making blunder after blunder. One general was threatened with arrest by Beria, and the whole episode increased the general mutual animosity between the military and Beria. Beria returned to the Caucasus in the early spring of 1943 to address the question of supplies, but he stayed just over a week before returning to the relative safety of Moscow.

The NKVD also became involved in the important effort to build up partisan work behind the lines not only to disrupt the Germans, but also to gather intelligence; they were sometimes referred to as "destruction battalions." This effort increased along the entire front especially in the Ukraine and Belorussia, and Beria made much of its success to Stalin. Beria had a special interest in Belorussia where one of his home henchmen Lavrenty Tsanava was working; but in Belorussia not all the partisans appreciated Beria.* However, the partisans were themselves divided, which given the reality of their dangerous task was no surprise, and soon the Red Army took a firmer control over this chaotic expression of war.

The most important element however was the intelligence work with men behind the lines discovering what was happening. This led to a degree of co-operation with the British SOE who sent a Brigadier George Hill to Moscow where he met Beria who, he noted, appeared uncommonly interested in guns which had been effectively silenced when they fired. Hill observed "all his ruthlessness came to the fore, and I realised the power that he had within him, power that has brought him to, and kept him at the top...the more I saw of him, the less I liked him; an evil, sinister creature."³⁶⁸ This came from an SOE officer who by his training and experience was used to dealing with tough and sometimes ruthless men.

As the war turned in favour of the Soviets during 1943 the NKVD was divided into two sections. The chief administration of State Security of the NKVD was transformed into the People's Commissariat of State Security

* This relationship was widely known and Lavrenty Tsanava was sometimes known as "Lavrenty the Second."

(NKGB) and SMERSH (Death to Spies) which was intended for Counterintelligence. On the surface this appeared to diminish Beria's powers as Stalin placed Abakumov in charge, but Abakumov always listened to Beria, although Stalin gave the appearance of taking Abakumov under his wing. It has sometimes been suggested that Stalin was again becoming wary of those with too much influence and power, or simply that the organisation was so massive at this time it needed restructuring for sheer efficiency. It certainly was a common-sense policy to make such a division.

Beria never lost the power he had accumulated even when Counterintelligence was sensibly transferred to the Red Army. Beria's cohorts still held key positions, and with the apparatus Beria had created they were obliged to answer directly to him. Especially Merkulov who remained in charge as the new NKGB commissar. Beria's protégés were all over the place and Beria still retained his important position as a member of the GKO, and in May 1944 was promoted to deputy chairman of this supreme wartime authority. It is quite possible to speculate that Beria may have been frustrated by these changes, but such was his carefully built power-structure amongst his cronies, and his position in the war-cabinet GKO, he held onto his powerbase, and no doubt was continuously looking to the future now the war was turning.

The war was now gyrating in Russia's favour, but the Germans persisted in bitter fighting, and Beria's role became once again a matter of security, containment, and increased cruelty on a mass level. Stalingrad had been the turning point followed by the massive battle of Kursk. The Kursk confrontation was simply gigantic, and for this battle Beria's slave labour had dug "an unbelievable 3,000 miles of trenches. Over a million men and, including reserves, around 6,000 tanks" were involved in this deadly conflagration.³⁶⁹ The Eastern Front war was gigantic and the sacrifices so immense it was not surprising that the Russians always considered World War Two as their victory.

At the end of 1943 as the Red Army cleaned up behind the lines Beria reported to Stalin that for that year alone, he "had detained 582,515 uniformed persons, and in addition 349,034 civilians. They ranged from deserters to gangsters and marauders, or those without proper papers. Thousands more died in armed struggles."³⁷⁰

The functions of the NKVD were extensively widened, and they controlled a huge number of troops which has been estimated at nearly 650,000 to perhaps 750,000. Some historical analysts have estimated the figure to be a million. The troops were to investigate, and if necessary, punish those people who had been unfortunately overrun by the Nazi war machine, because Stalin had become suspicious of them as possible

collaborators and therefore traitors. Anyone who had been rumoured to have been disloyal in anyway was punished by death or deported, and Beria was responsible for these actions, many of which he personally ordered because he had oversight, and always took close control.

Thousands upon thousands were transported in cattle trucks, normally about forty per truck until it was noted children took less space and the number was increased to forty-five, travelling for weeks to places like Central Asia and Kazakhstan. They were given no food or water, there was no available sanitation and typhoid became rife and deaths occurred in untold numbers. When the train stopped, they buried their family members in the snow close by the train because to wander more than five yards from the rails meant instant death. Under Beria's supervision the NKVD, NKGB and SMERSCH worked together to carry out these barbaric so-called reprisals; the only crimes of these victims were that they were the unfortunate detritus of war.* Beria not only responded to Stalin's paranoid wishes, but he added his own selections. It was Beria who informed Stalin that in his opinion the Crimean Tatars should be deported. He handled the deportations of nationalities considered suspect by Stalin and himself, Chechens, Kalmucks, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and many others. Beria wrote to Stalin on August 18th, 1944 about the "small Caucasus spa towns Pyatigorsk, Kislovodsk, Zheleznovodsk, and Essentuki in the Stavropol district. Still living there, he said, were 'the families of active German collaborators and traitors who had been convicted or voluntarily departed with the Nazi occupiers.' He wanted permission for the NKVD 'to purge these cities by relocating 850 family members.'"³⁷¹ This information indicated the massive numbers caught up in the Soviet retribution.

The same ruthlessness was applied to Red Army officers who had allowed themselves to be captured. Beria branded them as traitors and "according to the notorious Order 00270, generals and other officials, including those in the NKVD, were subject to the death penalty," even their relatives were included.³⁷² Stalin made no exceptions and when his son Yakov was captured his wife was arrested. She was released two years later when Stalin felt satisfied that his son was not a traitor. "Between 1944 and 1949, a total of 5.45 million Soviet citizens from all countries, including POWs and civilians, were repatriated to the Soviet Union whether they wanted to be or not."³⁷³

* SMERSCH: "The counterintelligence men used to love that tastelessly concocted word SMERSH, manufactured from the initial syllables of the words 'death to spies.' They felt it intimidated people." Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.18

As early as late 1943 the authorities began preparing a *Chechevitsa*, a complete roundup and deportation of all the peoples of the Northern Caucasus. This was regarded as a solution to traitors and ethnic problems, and Beria travelled to Grozny to supervise the operation; he expected some resistance. The cleansing started in February 23rd-24th of 1944 and lasted for weeks. Beria gave the final tally “as nearly a half million people, though his figures have a typical phony exactitude.”³⁷⁴ Beria would send reports daily and “liked to observe the process first hand, and reminded Stalin in May 1944 that there were still more anti-Soviet elements in Crimea.”³⁷⁵ These reports read like police traffic assessments and Appendix Three gives a typical example of one of Beria’s missives, and demonstrates the well-known phrase “the banality of evil.” As far as Beria was concerned “this suffering had no meaning. It was all part of a day’s work: ‘The deportations were a routine, successful NKVD operation for which he [Beria] might receive an additional approval from his leader.’”³⁷⁶ Only Beria and Stalin could believe that whole ethnic groups could all be traitors. Hundreds of NKVD men received awards for their efforts.

After Stalingrad and Kursk, Stalin was relaxed in his own self-perceived greatness, and the repression of the conquered and re-conquered territories was immense. The repression had been severe in the Ukraine area where nationalist armies had been fighting the Soviet forces; Beria and Khrushchev had retaliated with brutality, as well as in the Caucasus and Crimea. It was during these campaigns that Beria had suggested that further whole ethnic groups should be deported. “Stalin’s men had to distribute this unwanted human flotsam throughout their empire” and Beria followed this through with his attack on the dubious loyalty of the Tatars in the Crimea.³⁷⁷ This happened time and time again as Beria’s suspicious mind was drawn to various ethnic groups, many of whom died in transit from lack of food, overcrowding and lack of sanitation. It was no different from the Nazi oppression. Needless to point out the Gulag camps grew exponentially during these fraught years with innocent soldiers and civilians. The great sadness was the way the West co-operated with Stalin’s demands, and under the postwar prisoner exchange thousands of victims were returned to the Soviet Union in the certain knowledge that they faced death or slave-labour. This led to some bitter recriminations, and even legal investigations later during the Cold War.

As the euphoric sense of jubilation was reached as the end of the war came into sight, the Western Allies prepared for a major conference, and Stalin decided to seek a new national anthem and invited composers to submit their ideas. Voroshilov was put in charge of the “song contest” and this all led to the strange mix of Shostakovich and Prokofiev with Stalin,

Beria and Voroshilov spending time together choosing the right songs and music, while momentous global events were taking place around them.

At the same time Stalin turned his spite on the very officers who had helped gain the victory. Voroshilov the deputy commissar of defence was removed, and as mentioned earlier the highly popular and successful Marshal Zhukov came under threat after the fall of Berlin, and he was sidelined to the Odessa Military District. There is little doubt that Stalin would have preferred him dead, but he was already too popular. The reasons for this obnoxious behaviour towards a successful commander was simply Stalin's wish to be regarded as the sole source of the Russian victory. Stalin's fiasco to take warning of German intentions in 1940-1941 and his failure to prepare for an attack were all forgotten, and he was now the man who had saved Russia and the rest of the world. Stalin and Hitler both distrusted the military not least because such men had the possible potential for a coup, or at the least the sowing of dissent. Later Khrushchev and Brezhnev would hold Zhukov in the backwaters for the same reasons.

Beria, as noted, had always detested the military and took great delight in organising Stalin's attack upon the Red Army leaders. The commanders were no longer mentioned in the press, they disappeared into the public void, and members of the police and security services were given military ranks. Beria became a Marshal of the Soviet Union, even though he had not taken any active control in frontline fighting, and it may well have been Stalin's ploy to put his military commanders in their place.* He had used slave labour to help war-industry, deported thousands of innocent victims, murdered others, and grown powerful (and rich) under the labour and bravery of other men. His attack on the military would not be forgotten, and in 1953 when he was arrested it was Khrushchev who was able to gain senior army commanders to offer support in bringing Beria down; it would have been a pleasure for them.†

As far as the outside world was concerned Beria was something of a mysterious figure lurking in the background. Those who had some knowledge of the Kremlin scene recognised that he held power, and he appeared close to Stalin, but he remained always an enigmatic character and

* After appearing to reject his cohorts' efforts to give Stalin the Soviet Union Gold Star award, Stalin eventually accepted the term of Generalissimo though he never liked the title which was used by his enemy Franco. It was for Stalin all to do with public image.

† Khrushchev always "held a special place in Stalin's affection: perhaps his irrepressible optimism, sycophantic devotion—and practical cunning made him a useful comrade." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.314

something of a puzzle. Stalin disliked anyone who held any prominence, and it was probably Beria's low profile which enabled him to survive. Beria was no fool in recognising this characteristic of Stalin and he utilised this fixation to his own benefit. Beria attended the Tehran Conference (1943) and the Yalta Conference (1945) but rarely mixed with the diplomats of whom he always held a deep suspicion.* Such was his ignorance of the outside world, and like many in that situation, he tended to be xenophobic and was more interested in domestic matters, especially security; "his main preoccupation was with the Byzantine world of Kremlin politics."³⁷⁸ It has been suggested that it was prior to the Tehran Conference that Stalin started to show the first signs of turning against Beria. As with Franco, Stalin disliked flying, but had little choice when attending the Tehran Conference, and his proposed pilot stumbled into a situation in which he found Stalin shouting abuse at Beria.³⁷⁹ On this occasion Beria had his own plane prepared, but Stalin suddenly swapped planes.[†]



Tehran Conference

Beria's sense of self-importance drew some attention to him as he insisted on extreme security whenever Stalin was present. The NKVD had

* Yalta had been under attack by the Nazis and this had been followed by Beria's attack on the Tatars and led Churchill to describe the area as "The Riviera of Hades."

† In a curious note Sudoplatov mentions that Otto Skorzeny was ready to launch an attack on Tehran which the Russians thwarted. See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.130

already prepared the Tehran site and Beria arrived and took charge. When Stalin was invited to a meal at the British Embassy Beria led the NKVD on a methodical search of the area where the event would take place. Beria also ensured that rooms were bugged with listening devices in order that private conversations could be overheard. At Tehran Sergo Beria (Beria's son) "manned the recording equipment bugging their rooms and was surprised to overhear FDR level a counteraccusation at Churchill for trying to engineer an anti-communist government" in Poland.³⁸⁰ Beria's son was clever and spoke both German and English which gave Beria the necessary excuse not to sacrifice him on the frontline.* It appeared Churchill was not fooled by Beria, various other reports on meeting Beria have surfaced from time to time, and while some found him convivial most felt his coldness and desire for power to be the dominant feature of his personality. For most he represented the dark and unknown side of Stalin and Kremlin life.

During the Second World War Beria had grown in power, not only by his intuitive political ability expressed through his total obedience to Stalin with his understanding of his master, but because Stalin needed a man like Beria. A servant who would respond to any demand, and who did not appear to have any ambition to promote himself above a status that would threaten Stalin. During the war years there was hardly an area of activity in which Beria was not involved, and his security and NKVD services ensured that slave labour became an essential contribution to the war effort. He was involved in population movements, industry, armaments, and always remained an active adviser to Stalin attending the Tehran and Yalta Conferences. He constantly clashed with anyone who disagreed or questioned him, especially the Red Army commanders, and he always intimidated High Command with the threat of arrest. As the war turned in Russia's favour, he tightened his grip on the forces whose commanders had always feared him because of his influence over Stalin: a mere hint from Beria could lead to their downfall. As the Russians moved into non-Soviet territory, he recruited and trained communist bodies which, when they became Soviet-dominated, came under his security forces. Having ensured this happened he established Communist groups in the newly acquired territories; Beria's priority was to establish a NKVD type structure answerable to Moscow.

* Stalin needed a daily appraisal from Beria's son as to what was being said, whether it was being said in a way which was genuine or whether Roosevelt was aware that he was being bugged. They later used directional microphones to hear Roosevelt as he was wheeled around in the open areas. Roosevelt always suspected that his conversations were recorded.

CHAPTER NINE

ATOMIC AGE



Stalin the Leader

As he prepared for the Potsdam Conference Stalin still considered himself a revolutionary, but he rode to Berlin in the style of the Tsars. On July 2nd Beria “reported to him that all security preparations had been made. Travel would be made by train from Moscow, over a distance calculated at no less than 1,195 miles. Beria was proud to say there would be ‘between six and fifteen men’ posted for each and every mile. He listed in loving detail all the security steps that were taken and the elaborate provisioning that would be provided on the way to and at the Big Three conference.”³⁸¹ The provisioning in manpower and luxury was immense, but in the immediate postwar years Stalin’s government could hardly feed the

population, and his correspondence with Beria later indicated that “they could not feed their army in Germany, let alone the East Germans.”³⁸² This was going to be a persistent problem because their priorities were erroneously balanced.

It was at Potsdam that the Americans informed Stalin of their atomic bombs. This was an area of intense interest to Stalin which had taken root early in the war, but the American announcement at Potsdam sowed one of the many seeds for growing the Cold War. Stalin was ignorant of physics and had often derided the subject. Beria was aware of his master’s views and was caught between being “Stalin’s ideological apostle” and the need for a similar weapon; as it was Stalin’s attitudes towards his scientists was simply: “leave them in peace. We can always shoot them later.”³⁸³

It has been stated that “the intelligence about Western atomic research in May 1945 had come to NKVD chief Beria, who reacted slowly. When Soviet scientists wrote to the Politburo (Stalin) asking to accelerate work on the bomb, they received only a muted response.”³⁸⁴ However, it is generally accepted that from the earliest days in 1940 there were rumours and fears that the Germans were looking into the prospect of an atomic weapon. Donald Maclean, the British spy had reported that the British government had initiated the necessary scientific study.³⁸⁵ Beria by nature was always suspicious, and as early as September 1941 one of his foreign agents had obtained some documents from this British agent from their Uranium Committee, and the first cryptograms about preliminary work on the atom bomb with uranium were sent to Moscow. However, “Beria had dismissed this intelligence as disinformation and only after the reports had reached Stalin” was it decided to take this further.³⁸⁶ Beria’s trusted henchman Sudoplatov, after organising the death of Trotsky, utilised his agents to work their way into the company of the atomic scientists. This was not a difficult task because “Sudoplatov realised that the scientists saw themselves as a new breed of super-statesmen whose mandate transcended boundaries; he and his officers exploited this hubris.”³⁸⁷ Beria, through Sudoplatov and his fellow agent called Eitingon used their “illegals” (agents) who convinced men like Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard, Alan Nunn May, Klaus Fuchs and many others to understand the common-sense of sharing their science with the Soviet Union.³⁸⁸ Many of these international scientists were only concerned about stopping Hitler and later were anti-violence hoping their new technology would produce a balance of power by sharing nuclear technology. In Russia the famous scientist Kapitsa had suggested the Soviets themselves should approach the Allies about sharing essential information.³⁸⁹ For the scientists it was a matter of defeating Nazism, but they did not want international collective suicide.

An infiltrated agent called Kheifetz (known as Mr Brown) had contacted Oppenheimer, raising the level of concern when he reported that America was prepared to spend twenty per cent of money allocated to military research on this project. It was decided that it was necessary to identify the top scientists in America designated to work on this undertaking. By March 1942 there was some concern on this atomic bomb issue in the Kremlin. As early as March Beria had written a letter to Stalin suggesting that the "State Defence Committee should consider establishing a scientific consultative committee" of the best scientists.³⁹⁰ Beria was immersed with hundreds of varying responsibilities, but he was now more than aware of the potential ramifications of atomic research.

When Truman told Stalin about the Atom bomb it appeared that Stalin showed little interest, but back in his own quarters "he told Molotov who said: 'they are raising the price.' Stalin replied, 'let them. We'll talk with Kurchatov and get them to speed things up.'"³⁹¹ The scientist Igor Kurchatov had already made considerable progress, and by December 1944 he had been given more resources.* As it was, plenty of information was supplied by spies from inside the Manhattan Project.

The background history of atomic development in the Soviet Union was somewhat patchy, but they were not in the dark. As early as 1941 Kurchatov had raised the question of a chain reaction which could create nuclear energy. Another scientist called Petri Kapitsa had drawn attention to the possibility of an atomic bomb in the same year.[†] Information had dribbled through to Beria's desk about this development, but it was filtered by a Lieutenant-General Fitin who "never presented to his superiors Merkulov, Beria and beyond them Stalin anything likely to incur their anger."³⁹² It has often been debated as to how much intelligence information reached the top echelons. During the initial attacks of Barbarossa, the early atomic project was shelved, but returned as the fortunes of war started to change in Russia's favour, and Beria's intelligence agents were soon gleaning information that

* **Igor Kurchatov** (1903-1960) was a Soviet Nuclear Physicist known as "the father of the Soviet Atomic Bomb." He later advocated the peaceful development of nuclear energy and assisted in the development of the Hydrogen Bomb. In 1949 he was involved in a serious accident caused by entering the hall of a damaged reactor; after which his health declined, and he died in Moscow in 1960 and become part of the Kremlin Wall.

† **Petri Kapitsa** (1894-1984) was an outstanding physicist with several major studies. He studied in England gaining a PhD at Cambridge and was deep into atomic research but clashed with Beria. In 1955 he became Director of The Institute for Physical Problems (in 1990 the Institute was named after him); he won the Nobel Prize in 1978 and he died in Moscow in 1984.

the German, British and American investigations into the possibility of an atom bomb, were decidedly serious. Though it has been often stated that Beria's suspicion of his own intelligence gathering had delayed the Soviet development of the bomb by years always fearing what he called "disinformation."³⁹³ Stalin reacted and called his leading scientists together to discuss the subject's viability. Kapitsa was regarded as the leading scientist, but Stalin typically selected Kurchatov as the team leader. Sudoplatov suggested in his memoirs that this choice was made on the basis that Oppenheimer was only thirty-eight at the time, and Stalin regarded energetic youth as the answer, and consequently Kurchatov, aged forty was appointed.³⁹⁴



Sudoplatov

When Beria was tasked with the Atomic project he set to work immediately and used his many resources overseas to find out as much as possible.* He used his trusted servant Sudoplatov who complained in his memoirs that he was already too busy with the German war. Such was the problem for the regime that few men were trusted, and those who were became over-worked. On Beria's instructions the necessary men employed in the project were given extra food and high-level medical care.³⁹⁵

* From the ruins of Berlin Beria had managed to secure some metallic uranium, some uranium oxide and heavy water. See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.441 fn

It was known as the *Number-One* task and Beria had nearly 500,000 people to manage, including technicians and high-flying scientists, but it is claimed that the well-known Klaus Fuchs was his main source for information.* He also made sure his agents had briefed Oppenheimer that anti-Semitism in the USSR “was now a dead letter.”³⁹⁶ As early as 1943 Solomon Mikhoels had been instructed by Beria to make an American tour and inform his contacts that Jewish contributions were respected in the Soviet Union. Mikhoels then became something of a celebrity which partly explains why Stalin later ordered his death.

The information flowed through to Beria’s desk, but as always, he was highly suspicious of its validity. The British and Americans did not discover the spy system until an Igor Guzenko a cypher clerk in Ottawa defected. “The extent to which the Soviets relied on intelligence gathering to develop their own bomb has only recently come to light,” but it gave considerable information and huge rafts of testing experiments involving considerable time, which could be taken for granted by the Russian scientists.³⁹⁷ During these early years Molotov was the leader in charge, but Kurchatov took the step of complaining to Beria that Molotov was not allowing appropriate progress. A complaint to Beria was risky, but Kurchatov had correctly worked out that this would reach Stalin, and Beria replaced Molotov, even though Beria was not to become a full member of the Politburo until March 1946. This change of authority to Beria prompted Kurchatov’s assistant to claim that “Beria’s administrative abilities were obvious for all of us at that time. He was unusually energetic. Meetings did not drag on for hours; everything was decided quickly.”³⁹⁸ One thing that was clear was Beria’s “singular ability to inspire both fear and enthusiasm.”³⁹⁹ Beria supplied the necessary labour from the Gulag camps which apparently the scientists hardly noticed; they were obsessed with fulfilling their mission, and like many of their compatriots were worried in seeking a balance of power before the Americans attacked Russia with atomic power. It was the Gulag labour that produced the necessary buildings, laboratories and testing sites. Many of the prisoners were specially trained and worked in highly secretive centres which needed constant guarding.

* **Klaus Fuchs** was a highly respected physicist who had emigrated to Britain from Germany and had offered to spy for the Soviets as early as 1941. He continued this effort while working on the Manhattan project in America. “Fuchs understood the war could not be won without the Red Army. It made sense to him, therefore, to keep the Russians informed...the idea of sharing the bomb secrets did not seem as outlandish at all to his colleagues at Los Alamos” and he declined Russian payment. See Ings Simon, *Stalin and the Scientists* (London; Faber & Faber, 2017) p.330 He continued this until his arrest in 1950.

Stalin's equilibrium had been unsettled by his knowledge that the Americans had acquired the necessary information and ability to build an atom bomb. His chief scientist Kurchatov with his team investigated the project and, as noted, followed with interest critical information from Communist sympathisers and spies in the West. As such Stalin then established a Scientific-Technical Council, and the Special Committee was headed by Beria.

One scientist complained directly to Stalin in 1945 that Beria was ignorant of science and he wanted not just to copy the Americans, but produce a cheaper and distinctly Russian version; he was ignored.* This scientist was Kapitsa who despised Beria claiming he knew nothing about science, and although Beria tried to smooth matters over by giving him an expensive gift of a gun, Kapitsa remained hostile and was therefore eventually shelved.† Kapitsa had written to Stalin in frank terms which could have had him shot on the spot, stating "there was a time when the Patriarch stood alongside the Emperor; the Church was then the repository of culture. The Church is becoming obsolete and the patriarchs have had their day, but the country cannot manage without leaders in the sphere of ideas...it is time for comrades like Beria to begin to learn respect for scientists."⁴⁰⁰ Stalin eventually protected Kapitsa from death, but the scientist was carefully side-lined. Beria had experienced similar hostility from the military, which always arose from his characteristic problem of being in charge, asserting himself, and assuming he always knew better. It should be noted that there were some scientists who liked working with Beria and found he grasped the essential facts, kept meetings short and to the point, and they found him a first-class administrator prepared to see a task through to its natural conclusion.

Beria discovered two German scientists called Gustav Hertz and Baron Manfred von Ardenne who were to work in a guarded place near Sukhumi in Abkhazia. They were disgruntled at their living conditions and complained; they were so necessary in the research that Beria met their complaints partway. Progress was made and on Christmas Day 1946 Beria witnessed the opening of the first atomic reactor. When news of this initial success came through Beria had rushed to Elektrostal (about fifty miles east of Moscow) to watch the nuclear reactor go critical, but his ignorance of the science confused him when nothing obvious happened, and he demanded to

* The scientist was Pyotr Kapitsa who later became a Nobel Laureate, and according to some he had asked to be relieved from his work, though he was removed to a form of house arrest.

† Once again Beria used his trusted henchmen Sudoplatov to present the gift; Beria did not go in person as suggested by some historians.

enter the reactor. The scientists dutifully restrained him from such a fatal risk, but “this would have been a delicious prospect for millions of Beria’s victims.”⁴⁰¹

As noted in the history notes the first bomb was tested in Kazakhstan in September 1949 and it was successful. He had with him men who had witnessed the American explosion but despite the enormous blast and damage Beria still needed to be convinced that it was a success.⁴⁰² On this momentous occasion Beria behaved in an uncharacteristic way and hugged and kissed Kurchatov, but he still delayed telling Stalin before he had checked that the bomb had been a total success. When he eventually contacted Stalin, who had gone to bed, Stalin told Beria he already knew and put the phone down. Beria was furious realising that someone on the site had beaten him to his personal announcement of triumph. “Beria shook his fist at those around him and exploded; ‘Even here you put spokes in my wheels, traitors! I’ll grind you into powder!’”⁴⁰³ Beria undoubtedly knew at this juncture that Stalin was holding him down if not turning against him. He had probably utilised his efforts in the atomic sphere of activity to regain Stalin’s favour. The undeniable fact was that much of the necessary information for the new weapons had already been in Soviet espionage hands, but the Russian scientists had pushed the boundaries. Beria was concerned when the Americans publicly announced the Russian success before the Russians. There was an immediate suspicion that the Americans had an agent within the system until the scientists explained that such an explosion could be detected by sampling air near the borders.

In 1952 America detonated a thermonuclear device in the Pacific, and Russia followed in 1953 with “Beria again the politician in charge, and by August 12th, 1953, they successfully replicated the American experiment,” but this time Beria was under arrest.⁴⁰⁴ From this point on global war could become collective suicide, and Beria may have been the bully-boy politician in atomic research, but his tactics, administration skills and organisational abilities carried the project through with a speed which surprised the Americans.

CHAPTER TEN

THE COLD WAR AND INTERNAL TENSIONS

As mentioned in the history section much of the postwar period was consumed by the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, which was one of the factors that aggravated the Cold War. The agreed policy amongst the victors had been that of democratic elections, and initially there had been shared government based on party coalitions, but it was known in Beria's and Molotov's circles that this was a temporary phase.⁴⁰⁵ The Communists were widely supported because during the war it had been the local Communist resistance to the Nazis which had been the most effective. Beria was proactive in ensuring the various Communist parties took over total control, doing most of this time from behind his desk, organising the plans from a distance.

Sudoplatov also made the point that there was an underlying agreement between the powers to divide the spoils, noting that "Stalin is bitterly attacked for betraying principles of human morality in signing a pact with Hitler; it is overlooked that he also signed a secret deal to divide Europe with Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta, and later with Truman at Potsdam."⁴⁰⁶ There were some ironical truths contained in Sudoplatov's cynical views. The Soviets were flexible to start with, simply because they could afford to be. Beria ensured there were agents in all the vital areas reporting back on any events or the people most likely to try and unsettle these long-term plans.

The relationship between the Americans and Soviets was at first cordial if not comradely, but it was for both sides something of a façade. As mentioned earlier Stalin had rejected the Marshall Plan, but curiously Sudoplatov suggested that the Soviets looked at it with more interest than most commentators realised. The Soviets had been alerted by Donald Maclean, then first secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, that the plan was to ensure American domination of Europe.⁴⁰⁷ There were also suspicions that this would be contrary to Soviet plans to use East German resources as part of their reparation projects. Beria had his views which were all parochial to Soviet interests, and although he had authorised thousands of agents to infiltrate overseas, he was lacking any real knowledge of

matters outside the Soviet Union. All Beria wanted was the consolidation of control in Eastern Europe, namely the wish of Stalin. From the Soviet perspective the Cold War had its origins in Western support for nationalist unrest in the Baltic States and Western Ukraine. Beria and Khrushchev decided to liquidate any resistance to Soviet domination in the Ukraine. The overall world perspective escaped men like Beria who continued to use repression to take total control under the eagle eyes of Stalin. However, and as always, Beria was more concerned about the intrigues and machinations on the home front.

During the time Beria had given his attention to the atomic project there were serious political changes made under Stalin's directions. In 1946 it was announced that Beria had stepped down as head of the NKVD. Beria's work in advancing his security apparatus not only in Russia, but in newly occupied territories, was making Stalin suspicious of his increasing power. However, in early 1946 Beria was made a full member of the Politburo and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, but more to the point he was replaced as head of the NKVD by Sergei Kruglov.* Not long after this Beria's protégé Merkulov was replaced as the head of MGB by Viktor Abakumov "who, like Kruglov, did not belong to Beria's Caucasian mafia."⁴⁰⁸ This was at least Stalin's hope, but it soon became clear that Abakumov had become Beria's lapdog and always reported to him, although some argue that in Abakumov Beria had met his match.⁴⁰⁹ Abakumov was needed by Stalin because he demanded total secrecy and control, and Abakumov was soon at "the centre of a complicated, multidimensional game."⁴¹⁰

When news of the American creation of the CIA in 1947 was scrutinised, it caused deep concern in Moscow because it was understood that the CIA's intention of using military and civilian intelligence could be effective. Molotov argued that it was essential to unify the foreign intelligence directories of the MGB and the GRU under a single roof.[†] This "proposal had the further advantage, from Stalin's view point, of weakening the influence on security of Lavrenty Beria, whose protégé, Abakumov, headed the MGB."⁴¹¹ In the machinations of the personal power-play it was not an easy matter uniting the various agencies. The resultant KI (Committee of Information) was unstable from the beginning.[‡] Personal jealousy and the

* Kruglov held an honorary British knighthood in recognition of his security services of the Big Three.

† The MGB was the Soviet Ministry of State Security and the GRU was the Soviet Military Intelligence agency.

‡ The KI was the Committee of Information which was the combined foreign directories of MGB and GRU.

need to maintain a grip on individual power marred the scheme; using the excuse that military intelligence had been reduced to a subordinate role. There was a major dispute involving Molotov and Bulganin who managed to withdraw military intelligence from the KI, and “probably with the support of Beria, Abakumov, the head of the MGB, then embarked on a long campaign to recover control of the remains of the KI.”⁴¹² (In late 1951 the KI was disbanded and reabsorbed by the MGB.)

When the NKVD and NKGB became the MVD and MGB it was clear that Beria had not lost his authority. He was now becoming an important politician, which allowed him to spend more time on the atomic research. Stalin as cautious as ever made sure that Beria’s Georgian lapdogs were replaced if only to ensure that Beria’s influence was not too widely spread. Nevertheless, as noted, there was no apparent decline in Beria’s national status. In the immediate postwar period he often appeared to be third in the line of ascendancy after Stalin and alongside Malenkov.



Malenkov

Occasionally Molotov would ascend in the scheme of power leaving Malenkov with Zhdanov lurking in the background. The political rearrangements appeared not to have damaged Beria’s political situation. He was often close to Stalin giving advice even on foreign matters. According to Khrushchev, Beria pestered Stalin about the return of some Turkish territory close to the Georgian border, and when Stalin heeded this advice it backfired

as the Turkish government sought proffered American help, which meant the USA had bases in that part of Turkey close to the Soviet border.⁴¹³

Many of the national policies during this period were left to Stalin's cohorts and although some of them were major issues they often reflected the bickering for power. This became more pronounced as speculation arose that Stalin was not so well during these years (it was rumoured he suffered a slight stroke in 1945 and another in 1947) and was taking extensive summer holidays in his dacha, although he also conducted foreign business from this home in the south. As he did so his ministers used their policies to forge ahead of one another in the race to be close to the top, and to be perceived as a likely successor for power.

A typical scenario of this situation were the developments in East Germany. Malenkov was supposed to be responsible for the industrial ministries and there were various debates on stripping East Germany of its industry, but Zhdanov fought for the policy of allowing the industries to stay in order that war debts could be paid. Beria was caught between the two; he favoured walking alongside Malenkov rather than Zhdanov, but he was also interested in the possible uranium and ore deposits in Saxony. Eventually Beria decided it was better to stay with Malenkov if only for a brighter personal future. These two men were becoming more and more linked as they sought support in one another's company, and they often used the same car to return home after a long difficult night at Stalin's dacha, causing Stalin to say: "that pair of scoundrels."⁴¹⁴



Zhdanov

Beria had never found Zhdanov easy as a comrade and they had often clashed. He must have been somewhat concerned when Malenkov was sidelined in Central Asia. It was a matter of Kremlin politics and in 1946-47 it appeared as if Zhdanov were in the ascendancy. It was all a competition for primacy of position, and Beria had his sights set high and Zhdanov would have been fully aware of this tension; there is little question that Beria saw Zhdanov as a threat especially as the latter's protégés became more numerous. This political chess game of seeking a winning position is a common human trait even in the democracies, but in a totalitarian state it was both risky and dangerous.

As mentioned in Part One there rose the vexed question of anti-Semitism once again. During the war the various ethnic groups had been unified to fight the German military threats which, once passed, were forgotten, and whole populations (including Jews) were shifted East, but prominent Jews at home also suffered. It was almost as if they were regarded as a national aberration. Zhdanov was often pinpointed as one of the instigators, and his articles appeared attacking Jewish work especially art, music and Jewish scholarship. The JAC, the Jewish Antifascist Committee, had been established to unite Jewish people against the Nazi threat, but it was not long before it became evident that the Jews were suffering from a purge.

As early as 1946 Stalin had called for the dissolution of the JAC, and Zhdanov had a key role. The death of Solomon Mikhoels related in Part Two (a famous theatre director and head of the JAC) was killed in circumstances which bore all the characteristics of a Stalin directed State-murder. It appears there was no evidence that Beria was behind the scheme, (Beria had once been the nominated motivating force behind the JAC), but it was Abakumov who had probably been ordered by Stalin to organise this attack. Because of his looks there had been a rumour that Beria himself was Jewish, but there is no evidence for this claim. It has been suggested that Beria seemed to have looked after Jewish interests, though he had never hesitated to shift populations of Jews when demanded. Beria would have been anti-Semitic as and when it promised him political opportunity, but it was Stalin who was anti-Semitic.

In her youth Stalin's daughter suffered because of her relationship with Jewish men, and when her first husband transpired to be of Jewish origin, she noted that because "he was Jewish, my father didn't like it." They married, and Stalin accepted it on the condition "that my husband never set foot in his house...he never once met my first husband."⁴¹⁵ There were and remain rumours that Stalin intended to deport all Jews, "but no conclusive evidence has come to light."⁴¹⁶

The very fact that during this new developing anti-Semitism Beria came under attack helps underline the fact he had little to do with the killing of Solomon Mikhoels. The attacks on Beria had more to do with the tussle of supremacy, especially those surrounding Zhdanov and many others, including Khrushchev, were caught up in this anti-Semitic drive which resulted in the infamous Doctors' Plot. It appeared at this time that Beria was under attack, and even in Georgia where he had once been worshipped alongside Stalin, he was losing some of his support. Many of his protégés had been replaced and the impression was that Moscow was trying to reduce Beria's influence in Georgia. It was mainly, once again, more a struggle of internal power cliques than a matter of high policy. The two major contenders for supremacy were Zhdanov and Malenkov, with Beria at that time linked to the latter.

By 1949 Molotov was out of favour with Stalin and was succeeded as Foreign Minister and Chairman of the KI by Andrei Vyshinsky who had been the brutal prosecutor at the show-trials.* Curiously it was noted that Vyshinsky emulated Beria in the way he conducted himself; starting any interview in an accusatory fashion and always abusive. Vyshinsky had "retained from the 1930s a sycophantic admiration for Beria" and as a result Beria's influence over the KI rapidly increased.⁴¹⁷ The First Deputy was Sergei Romanovich Savchenko who was also a protégé of Beria, who appeared to answer to Beria rather than the Foreign Minister. It was all a matter of grasping personal power which was a technique of which Beria was the master.

As in the 1930s Soviet intelligence targeted real opponents and imaginary ones. "Like Stalin, Beria and Abakumov interpreted Tito's break with Moscow in 1948 as part of a wide-ranging imperialist conspiracy to undermine the Soviet Bloc."⁴¹⁸ Zhdanov informed Cominform that he had proof that Tito was in league with the Imperialists. Many of these allegations were made to discredit Tito, but they chiefly indicated Stalin's paranoid tendencies, and once again the problems of the internal tussle for power.†

* Stalin had developed a distrust of Molotov early on, and this was probably based on his popularity and power as well as Molotov's Jewish wife of whom he was always suspicious. As noted in the text Stalin always took an interest in his cohorts' wives. Molotov had agreed with Stalin concerning his own wife's Jewish background just to survive. Beria later would whisper to Molotov that his wife was still alive even though she was in the interrogation rooms of the Lubyanka. Malenkov also had to extricate his family from their Jewish connections.

† Stalin was especially angry when Tito formed an alliance with the Bulgarian leader Dimitrov without permission, and he was annoyed at their defiance even when confronted by Stalin, Beria and Zhdanov.

When Zhdanov had died from a heart attack in 1948 the usual rumours circulated about his death then and later, but Zhdanov's death from natural causes was highly likely, not least because of his weight and life-style.* The end of Zhdanov provided Beria and Malenkov with the way forward, and by 1949 both were seemingly in good stead with Stalin once again. Probably with Stalin's connivance Zhdanov's name was denounced, and there followed a mini-purge of all his followers. This was often dubbed the "Leningrad Case" as those close to Zhdanov lost their posts, their reputations and in many cases their lives. This long list remains somewhat obscure and at times difficult to define. The Leningrad Affair was reflective of the purges of 1936-38 and would have made many nervous. Malenkov who probably led this anti-Zhdanov attack more than Beria enlisted the help of Abakumov of the MGB, who had worked out which way the wind was blowing. Amongst those to fall during this time of vengeance was Kuznetov (CC Secretary), Voznesensky (Politburo member) and Popkov (the Leningrad First Secretary). Voznesensky was one of the more important ones to be moved and was later executed following the Leningrad Case in 1950.† At one stage it had appeared that Stalin had intended Voznesensky to be his successor.‡ It was later claimed that Beria hated Voznesensky because he saw him as a competitor in the ever-present internal power struggle, but both Stalin and Malenkov eventually distrusted the man. By the end of 1949 the Zhdanov faction had become a thing of the past, and Beria was once again ensconced near Stalin's throne.

Beria during this year appeared to have become Stalin's favourite again, and he took greater ease in his social life as always trying to be as close to Stalin as possible. As mentioned earlier Beria would amuse himself at his dacha, which had formerly belonged to Vlas Chubar, (a well-known Ukrainian Bolshevik, arrested in 1937), by shooting at targets with various fire-arms. "Houses also have their own destinies. All superior dachas, originally built at government expense by good architects, were inherited by the next owner. Molotov [now] lived in Yagoda's former dacha...Beria's dacha was sumptuous, immense. The big white house stood among tall spruces. The furniture, the wallpaper, the lamps had all been made to the architect's designs."⁴¹⁹ It was a luxurious life for those at the top of the

* Had Stalin or Beria wanted Zhdanov's death it would have been an easy medical assassination because he had five attacks before the one which killed him.

† After the Great Purges life had settled down for the politicians and military after 1938, and Voznesensky was the first major player to find that the purges had reignited.

‡ The same scenario was played through with another would-be successor Kuznetsov.

political echelon, but for ordinary people it remained grim and a matter of day to day survival.

Beria held a lifelong passion for football and his NKVD (later MVD) ran the Dynamo Football club (the Trade Unions had their own club called Spartak), and “an invitation to watch a game in Beria’s box for a young Chekist meant entering his circle.”⁴²⁰ When Sudoplatov was first invited into the special box he wrote “I was now a person trusted by the leadership of the country,” which stopped others spreading rumours about him.⁴²¹

Stalin’s habits at a social level tended to be late-night drink-sodden dinners with his closest cohorts, mainly at his dacha which he preferred to the Kremlin. Stalin’s daughter stated that Stalin spent most of his time at his various dachas, claiming “the idea that Stalin lived in the Kremlin is a false one. I can’t imagine who thought it up. It is only true in the sense that my father’s office and work were in the Kremlin.”⁴²² Foul language and drunken pranks were a characteristic of these events as his sycophants pleased him by joining in as he observed. As Stalin’s daughter wrote “these merrymaking leaders amused themselves with coarse practical jokes, the victims being mostly Poskrebyshev and Mikoyan.”^{*} As for Beria, he would just incite my father and others,” they would all go home drunk and “Beria, too, would often go home in this condition, although no one ever dared slide a tomato under him. My father called him the ‘Prosecutor.’”⁴²³

The question may be asked as to “Why did Stalin hold these nightly orgies? Wasn’t it in order to assert his status as Master outsider the Kremlin offices? Here in Kuntsevo, under the influences of drink (just try *not* to drink) the true face of each of his colleagues was revealed. Just try to ignore the invitation or plead illness.”⁴²⁴ Khrushchev tried to avoid drinking on one occasion complaining he had a kidney issue, but Beria claimed he had the same problem which left Khrushchev with no excuse. Beria revelled in these occasions acting as Stalin’s court jester. On one occasion the *Pravda* editor Leonid Ilichev did not drain his glass in a toast to Stalin. This was not etiquette according to their rules and Beria announced he would finish it for him. “The editor was speechless with fear” and only survived by becoming totally drunk.⁴²⁵

By 1949 some observed that Stalin appeared to be drinking less and less probably aware of his declining health, but these drunken parties allowed him to act as the grand friendly host while he explored the true character of his helplessly drunken cohorts. It appears that none of the participants

^{*} **Mikhail Poskrebyshev** (1891-1965) was assigned to work for Stalin in the Kremlin. In 1930 he was Chief of the Special Section of the Central Committee. He was forcibly retired in the post-1953 re-arrangements probably because of involvement in the Doctors’ Plot.

enjoyed these occasions, especially Khrushchev and Beria, and when Beria's wife challenged him he answered: "you have to put yourself on the same level as the people you're with."⁴²⁶ There is little doubt that Beria revelled in these occasions not only to play up to Stalin but to engage his waspish wit on his colleagues. He would often take home his drunken comrades and put them to bed, and certainly Bulganin virtually became an alcoholic. It would appear from later reports that none of the party participants enjoyed the evenings, muttering to one another about the boredom of having to listen to Stalin's endless repetitious stories, and Beria even suggesting that Stalin was lying, not that he would ever dare say this outside the peculiar privacy of the urinals.⁴²⁷ Stalin would insist on telling and re-telling his exploits even going back to his childhood and the way he was beaten by his father. Stalin would often boast he was a good shot with a gun, but on one occasion in the garden when shooting at some caged birds he nearly shot Mikoyan. His cohorts all dreaded these evenings and waited in trepidation for the phone call summoning them to the dacha. Despite the boredom Beria always remained the perpetual sycophant, and he remained powerful because for him it was a game of social chess at which he excelled, always managing the right move to please Stalin or challenge a colleague.

At a personal level Beria was intimately involved in every aspect of the social life surrounding Stalin, causing his daughter in her fraught existence to blame him for being involved even in the arrest of some of Stalin's family members. "True" she wrote, "my aunts were inclined to blame Beria for the arrest which had fallen upon our family... Yevgenia Alliluyeva maintained that, as far she was concerned, Beria could not forgive her a personal insult, having a sharp tongue, she had once, in a large company, in my father's presence, made fun of the crude way in which he made advances to women, Beria had felt foolish, everyone had laughed, and this he had remembered."⁴²⁸

During the postwar years Beria had ingratiated himself with Stalin and had become friendly with Georgy Malenkov who was widely regarded as Stalin's successor, and "until March 1953 one could always see Malenkov and Beria walking arm in arm. They always moved as a couple, and as such used to come to my father at his dacha, in appearance the closest of pals."⁴²⁹ However, in June 1953 when the gloves were off Malenkov did not support his old crony; "no one came to Beria's support, everyone now being as afraid of him as they had been of my father. The government's secret archives were in his hands, and this didn't suit the members of the Politburo at all."⁴³⁰ In these observations Stalin's daughter underlined the nature of the inner-Kremlin politics; friendships were only a matter of political convenience and advancement. This remains true of many politicians in

many systems, but in Communist Russia it was potentially a deadly game of chess.

In March 1949 Beria appeared to be in the ascendancy and his fiftieth birthday was marked by the award of the Order of Lenin. The American ambassador observed what was happening and noted the powerful grouping of Molotov, Malenkov and Beria stating that “no struggle is likely to occur that is in any way commensurate with the battle of the giants which took place after Lenin’s death.”⁴³¹ The ambassador missed the fact that in 1949 Stalin had not only turned seventy but was becoming more paranoid than usual, and there is no doubt with the benefit of hindsight that these men, including Beria, were not as trusted by Stalin as many believed to be the case. Stalin could not bring himself to the point of countenancing a replacement for his glorious self. This is a characteristic of dictators and many egotistical leaders who find it impossible to contemplate a life beyond themselves. It took years of persuasion to tie down Franco in Spain to accept that one day someone would have to take his place. The irony was that with Zhdanov gone Beria had made himself a prime target for Stalin’s suspicions.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

STALIN TURNS AGAINST BERIA

Beria had been involved in nearly all of Stalin's terrors both domestically and the international scandals of massacre and population movements. As Stalin's daughter succinctly put it "he knew too much" and this not only placed him in danger with Stalin in the end-days, but this atmosphere probably deeply concerned the other would-be leaders within the regime.⁴³² In the early 1950s Beria's reputation and prominent position had appeared secure but the tide was turning against him, and with his political antennae he would have been aware of the emerging problems. Before the new decade opened Stalin, always acting on the principle of divide and rule amongst his subordinates, showed signs of initiating further purges. He had elevated Khrushchev from the Ukraine probably because he was becoming increasingly aware of the potential Malenkov-Beria power-house.

His paranoia was probably not helped by his increasing loneliness and his decreasing health. His daughter noting at this time that "as he'd gotten older my father had begun feeling lonely. He was so isolated from everyone by this time so elevated, that he seemed to be living in a vacuum."⁴³³ However, according to Beria's son Sergo, his father always believed that Stalin's loneliness was an act, he wanted the company of his men to keep an eye on them. Stalin would also have been aware of the various tensions amongst his cohorts as they sought to increase their own personal power. Molotov had noted that Stalin was "jittery" and "swung to extremes," and he "was jealous of Molotov and Zhukov's prestige, suspicious of Beria's power, and disgusted by the soft smugness of his magnates."⁴³⁴/* If later the consistent evidence is to be believed it was clear that Stalin's old cohorts, including Beria were becoming somewhat disillusioned with their master, although they maintained their apparent attachment to him out of mutual safety. "Stalin and Beria despised each other but were linked by invisible threads of past crimes, mutual envy and complementary cunning" but Stalin

* When Zhukov's residence was searched by the secret police they reported it was a museum, mainly collections of rare guns and paintings and loot gathered during the war.

still allowed Beria access to power, and Beria manipulated Stalin with his habitual scheming.⁴³⁵

Khrushchev started his careful ascendancy in Moscow with his own purge of the Moscow Party, and he increased his well-known policies of collectivising the farm system, a belief he had held for a long-time. He had pursued the idea of Agro-towns for years, but this concept was not welcomed by everyone. Malenkov also had a deep interest in agriculture and resented Khrushchev's arrival. Beria was cautious and at first took a neutral line trying to keep away from the potential friction, but his old friend Bagirov did not want the small farms of Georgia amalgamated, and Khrushchev, well-aware of their relationship, interpreted this as a coalition attack by Bagirov and Beria. Khrushchev now had Stalin's ear who ordered an investigation into Bagirov, but with Beria's help the investigation team were discredited and the investigation petered out.

Nevertheless, "it was becoming clear that Beria's power base in Transcaucasia was no longer secure from attacks by the centre."⁴³⁶ This became more and more apparent as Stalin started the process of replacing Georgian officials with Russians and attested Party members. It was becoming clear that Stalin was losing his trust in Beria although he continued to be a regular guest at Stalin's notorious evening drinking parties. This was probably to keep an eye on him. Stalin went so far as to order Abakumov to find potential prosecution cases against Beria's Mingrelian colleagues, and not to forget Beria himself: "Go after the Big Mingrelian."⁴³⁷ Stalin was playing his characteristic duplicitous game of subterfuge and control, and his cohorts were no different, in so far that they continued to use the principles of state policy as part of their power play to gain ascendancy over one another. Beria undoubtedly had relished too much his own glory in the atomic project, and this would not have pleased Stalin. Stalin knew that Beria would be cautious in his own private premises, aware that he might be over heard, for this reason, Stalin ordered listening devices to be placed in Beria's mother's household to verify any contacts with disgruntled Mingrelians overseas.

Curiously Stalin then removed Abakumov from his seat of power as he had done with his predecessors, not wanting any one man holding too much dominance; this was only a minor relief for Beria who knew he was now under attack. For a long time, it had been Malenkov and Beria's "goal to remove Abakumov, and they were prepared to use whatever means were at hand."⁴³⁸ New appointments were made by Stalin, and Khrushchev tended to appoint only Party people and nearly always ethnic Russians, including the later leader Leonid Brezhnev who was brought to Moscow to work within the MGB. It could be argued that Stalin wanted to ensure that Party

members were preparing for the future, but it was also a definite attack upon his traditional comrades who fell by the wayside, usually signalled by their lack of invitations to Stalin's evening meals; despite this Beria was a constant guest but now wary of his status within Stalin's domain.

On one occasion Stalin's interest for a potential purge was raised by the number of Russian aircraft that had been lost during the war because of mismanagement leading to many accidents. This became known as "the Aviators' Case" and Beria quickly perceived that it was aimed at him. It was not difficult for Beria to note this change of attitude. When Stalin went to dinner with Beria, he made much of Nina and ignored Beria, often refusing to speak to him in Georgian, and damning him with the faintest praise.⁴³⁹ Beria's enemies assisted this approach by Stalin, especially Vlasik who fed Stalin the necessary information.*

The attack on Beria was mainly focused on his fiefdom in Georgia. In the early 1950s Beria was still held in high esteem in his home territory, and he was frequently mentioned in tones of adulation in the press and public speeches. This was especially true of the Mingrelian groups. Over the years Beria had ensured his men were in key positions, and he even had his own appointees who held power on the lower rungs of the administration. It had been a shrewd move because even when he was attacked through the Georgian situation Beria still held considerable influence.

As already noted, Beria's dacha was of the finest quality and he enjoyed life when in Georgia. His biographer Amy Knight related an incident at his time when he took some official out in a boat, spotted a female swimmer whom he picked up, and deciding to force his attention upon her and threw the official into the sea. This was by Amy Knight's own reference not confirmable and it is curious that Alan Williams in his novel about Beria starts off with a very similar story.⁴⁴⁰ Many legends and stories surround Beria and it is a difficult path for the finest researchers to know whether there is a kernel of truth in the account or not. As previously noted, there is little doubt that his reputation for abusing women had substance, but some individual incidents are often questionable as legends tend to proliferate about many outstanding men, good or bad. There is, however, a great deal of certainty that by the end of 1950 Beria was under attack; this was no myth. During 1951 the first signals were coming from Moscow that Beria was being undermined. Beria was not universally loved in his home country

* **Nikolai Vlasik** (1896-1967) was a Soviet security official and a general. He headed Stalin's personal security from 1931-1952 when he was falsely charged with involvement in the Doctors' Plot. He was sentenced to ten years in the camps but in 1956 it was reduced to five. The sentence was annulled in 2000. His wife always maintained that her husband was convinced that Beria was responsible for Stalin's death.

not least because he had always favoured his own ethnic background of the Mingrelians.

In late 1951 Stalin without official consultation demanded a purge of the Georgian party and the state machinery. Almost immediately several important heads rolled, all of whom were Mingrelians and members of Beria's network. It was about the same time the USSR Supreme Soviet created two new regions based in Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Although this was happening in other Soviet republics, there were repercussions for Beria as some of his protégés lost their positions. A month later yet more officials were fired or sent elsewhere, and the whole episode was developing into another purge. In the March of 1952 Stalin pushed through another resolution to give added bite and momentum to his "Mingrelian conspiracy." There was considerable talk of corruption, cabals, and bribery which was probably true, but it is likely that the real target remained Beria. Khrushchev later claimed that Stalin was afraid of Beria and was more than happy that Beria should be destroyed. He also claimed that Beria was no Marxist which was mutually true, and he used Beria's wife Nina's connections to the Menshevik émigrés in Paris to undermine him.⁴⁴¹ He ordered Beria to hold a plenum of Georgia's Central Committee who obeyed and feigned shock at the revelations of corruption. Beria was to weather the storm, but "he emerged with a renewed sense of the fragility of his political and physical existence."⁴⁴²

Very few leading politicians now stood to praise Beria in public, and Beria must have realised he was a marked man. Some of Beria's old enemies such as Nikolai Rkhadze fell, but the deposed were mainly Beria's men, although he had planted so many, he never suffered a total loss of influence. The general attack was on "localism and patronage" which by its very nature implicated Beria. None of this helped that during this fraught time the Americans had moved close to the border in Turkey, and Khrushchev had always blamed Beria for this action. The other aggravation was that in the Transcaucasian area nationalistic and ethnic feelings always ran high. With these factors in mind Stalin started to link Mingrelian nationalism with sympathies towards Turkey. It was for Beria and his cohorts a dangerous time.

It was therefore curious that amongst the top men Stalin appeared to surround himself with the four men, Beria, Khrushchev, Malenkov and Bulganin rejecting other old comrades. These men mutually wary of one another and concerned for their own well-being lived in a sea of suspicion, but they were all adept at pandering towards Stalin and carrying out his belligerent demands. When Sudoplatov described Bulganin as "a man without any political principles, only the obedient servant of any leader," he could have applied this description to any of the four cohorts.⁴⁴³

The Khrushchev and Malenkov dachas were near one another and Beria's car was always waiting to pick them up. They all knew they were in potential harm's way from the erratic behaviour of the deteriorating dictator, and these last "four men standing decided, according to Beria's son, 'not to let Stalin set them against each other,'" prompting Stalin to ask whether they were forming a bloc against him.⁴⁴⁴

During October 1952 at the time of the Nineteenth Party Congress the purges in Georgia were becoming nearly as notorious as the mid-thirties as all the speakers attacked what they called "bourgeois nationalism;" Beria always responded with calculated caution. There were some elements of resistance against the tide of stated official opinion which was most unusual.⁴⁴⁵ To defy the Kremlin or the mood sponsored by Stalin was a dangerous road to take, especially when Beria was acutely aware of his vulnerability during these months. It has been argued that Beria was alert that at this stage in his life Stalin was less interested in the various debates over policy, hardly reading them, and like many Beria suspected that he was becoming tired with old age and illness. It was seen by others that at such a time Stalin could be even more dangerous as his paranoia was growing by the day. He had already made his suspicions of Molotov and Mikoyan clear, claiming they were Western infiltrators. This was the probable reason why Stalin disbanded the Politburo and created the twenty-five-man Presidium, with an informal group in the Presidium which significantly included men like Khrushchev, Malenkov, Kaganovich and even Beria. He may have done this in Beria's and Voroshilov's case based on his old premise that "one keeps one's enemies close," as well as his habit of being comfortable with men he was about to eliminate.

Khrushchev who continued to attack Beria's hold on Georgia was also drawing closer to Stalin as the in-house shuffle for power increased. Despite the local purge Beria still held many loyal protégés in place including some powerful figures with the MGB. Nevertheless, the move against Beria continued. Beria had alienated most of the military command apart from a few. One of these men was Marshal Shtemenko who had once accompanied him to the Caucasus during the war years. It was therefore somewhat significant that some of Shtemenko's closer cohorts were dismissed in late 1951; it was evidently dangerous to have the slightest connection with Beria. These dismissals cast a deadly shadow over Shtemenko because gone were the days when Beria could influence Stalin.*

* After Stalin's death Beria had Shtemenko re-instated for him only to fall again after Beria's arrest.

During his last months of life one of Stalin's unpleasant personal features seemed to dominate his thinking, namely his anti-Semitism. Russia had always been anti-Semitic and there had been pogroms initiated by the Tsarist regime, and, as noted, Stalin had shown his own feelings when his daughter became involved with Jewish men, not least when she married a Jew. During the war Stalin and his cohorts had supported Jewish people and other ethnic groups because their efforts were required to fight the Nazi threat. After the war this policy vanished, and Stalin's growing paranoia became fixated on plots by Jews. Although anti-Semitism had been a Russian tradition it has been claimed that Stalin was not fixated on it as the Nazi-type biological attack.⁴⁴⁶ It has also been suggested that because of his one-time comrades who had turned against him such as Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev had been Jewish, this had turned him into an anti-Semite. Nevertheless, although hating the Poles even more, there seems little question that Stalin was anti-Semitic especially against those of the male variety, though Sudoplatov (who was married to a Jewish wife and his closet associate was Leonid Eitingon was Jewish) tended to believe that Stalin's anti-Semitism was a façade for stirring up political conflict to his own ends, and he may well have been right.⁴⁴⁷ It is commonly believed that Stalin's machinations had much to do with him seeking a bargaining chip to bring international capital into the Soviet Union, pretending that the Jews could have their own settlement as mentioned in the Crimea. Sudoplatov was under the impression gained from Beria that the initiative came from the Americans, but it was an allure to attract American finances, and was soon dropped. Beria had instructed Sudoplatov to sound out Harriman on the idea of a Jewish settlement, with Sudoplatov later writing "I could not imagine at the time that to be associated with such discussions would turn into a kiss of death."⁴⁴⁸

As early as 1949 some prominent Jewish leaders had been detained, and in late 1951 the general secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, Rudolph Slanksy had been arrested.* This action had been taken claiming they had helped organise military arms to support Israel with its ongoing conflict with the Arabs. There may have been a double intention here because it was rumoured that Beria and the MGB had been in support of this effort. Abakumov had been instructed to investigate or fabricate this conspiracy against the State, and the so-called culprits, nine in all, were sentenced to death; they were known as the "apprentices of Zionism."⁴⁴⁹ The charges were supposedly based on high treason and espionage.

* Slanksy survived Stalin, but after the fall of Beria he was then denounced of the crime of being a "Beria man," and who had introduced Beria methods within his area of responsibility.

This episode arose from the infamous Doctors' Plot referred to in Part One. All of Stalin's major plots and purges "required a generic character: kulak or bourgeois social origins in the 1920s, Trotskyism in the 1930s, and now Jewish nationalism."⁴⁵⁰ As noted in Part One it appeared to have its origin in a letter written by Dr Timashuk about Zhdanov's death, not so much claiming, as it has been stated many times that he was killed by Jewish doctors, but the treatment was not the best as the ECG revealed he had needed constant bedrest. There was no doubt that Dr Timashuk was one of many vetted agents working in the Kremlin Hospital, and unfounded claims have been made that she was anti-Semitic. It was nearly four years before Abakumov drew Stalin's attention to the letter, but it was not Zhdanov's death which worried Stalin. At the time when Zhdanov had suffered his self-evident heart attack, he had been more than aware that Stalin was turning against him, probably because he was gaining too much prominence. He and Stalin had also fallen out in 1942 during the siege of Leningrad, which Stalin would never forget or forgive. As in the previous purges "those who had risen to governmental positions of great eminence before and during the war now found themselves being pushed aside;" as noted it was a sign of a new purge developing in Stalin's paranoid mind.⁴⁵¹

Timashuk's letter was only a distraction for Stalin's deeper purposes. Her complaint about a patient's treatment suddenly became of state interest. There is no question that Stalin was anti-Semitic, but his intentions ran beyond personal bigotry to domestic and foreign policy. Jewish people had suffered under the Tsars and the new Communist system had allowed many to rise in power. Jewish people held many prominent positions, and amongst the best known were Trotsky, Litvinov, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Yagoda, Kaganovich, to name just a few. After the Second World War Stalin was aware that the USA was the principal rival to the USSR, and he had become unsettled when the newly founded state of Israel self-evidently sided with the West. He therefore decided that Soviet Jews could not be trusted, and on December 1st 1952, "at the dramatic meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee, Stalin declared that 'every Jew is a potential spy for the United States.'"⁴⁵² For Stalin America and Zionism were linked, and the Doctors' Plot, the attack on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the Leningrad affair and the purging of the MGB (from July 1951 to September 1952 some 42,000 individuals were purged from the MGB) were all part of Stalin's peculiar way of finding enemies to exterminate.

At a foreign level he saw it as an attack on the West, at a domestic level it led to a destabilised state which therefore demanded his personal leadership to resolve. Sometimes Stalin created enemies to purge them claiming a destabilised country needed his firm leadership. Stalin was

constantly reasserting his political mastery. There is no doubt that this was a Stalin plot and Beria would have cooperated but with caution. Much of it remains a mystery to this day because after Stalin's death Beria eradicated the critical information about the plot.

It had all started with a general attack on any Jewish person involved with the JAC (Jewish Antifascist Committee) based on the charge they wanted to establish a Jewish republic in the Crimea in 1944; the consequence of this charge was that thirteen people were sentenced to death. This general attack spread like wild-fire and in the Ukraine several Jewish people were sentenced to death in Kiev. In January 1953, a few months prior to Stalin's death, the Doctors' Plot had been publicly announced as an effort by a group of doctors, who were mainly Jewish, to murder by poison political and even military leaders, which as previously noted, included Zhdanov. The intention was to instil greater public reaction, it was rumoured that they were working in conjunction with the Americans now sitting uncomfortably too close to the Turkish borders. This mendacious information along with the general impulse of anti-Semitism almost created a sense of frenzy.

It was self-evident that there was going to be another purge this time involving Jews and the fear of massive deportations; it may well have happened had it not been for Stalin's timely death. Beria and members of the MGB were worried because the devious plot implicated them in the same perceived problem. This connection had been noted earlier by Stalin probably because Beria was also one of his targets; Beria had some association with the workings of the JAC and this was enough for Stalin who may or may not have believed the facts were correct.* "If certain facts were not empirically true, they became functionally true to suit political purposes that, in Stalin's universe, represented a higher reality," which made life for his cohorts and many others menacing.⁴⁵³ It was impossible for Stalin's cohorts to know what was going on in his mind at the time, and even more impossible for historians who must rely on other evidence which may be only conjecture. This plot implicated many other people including his doctor and his own bodyguard Vlasik of many years.†

There have been arguments that Khrushchev was one of the instigators not only because of his well-known anti-Semitism, but also because of his long-term wish to destroy Beria. This may be true if only to the extent that Khrushchev, like Beria, found it expedient to follow Stalin's latest whims.

* It had been under Stalin's direction that Beria helped form the JAC.

† Because Vlasik had been so close to Stalin he "became Beria's venomous rival" but because of his loyalty Stalin started to suspect him as an enemy in his last days, Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.526

It has long been established and recorded that Khrushchev was anti-Semitic even in public statements then and later, but his desire to rid the Soviet system of Beria, although secret at the time, is now well established. The well-known historian of these years Robert Conquest has suggested that Stalin did not necessarily believe the case against the Jews, because during the purges he happily sent men to their deaths or captivity not believing the charges at all.⁴⁵⁴ It has also been suggested, but not in argument against Conquest's views, that Stalin was medically degenerating with the hardening of his cerebral arteries causing irrational judgement and increasing his inbuilt paranoia. "Having suffered some kind of major physical collapse—either a heart attack or a stroke—immediately after the war, which caused him to recuperate for long periods of time in Sochi, Stalin had to demonstrate that he was still the 'master of the house,' able to control foreign policy, domestic policy, the security services, and the military, as well as Soviet agriculture."⁴⁵⁵

As mentioned earlier the case against the doctors had most likely found its original impetus in Dr Lydia Timashuk's exposed letter, but some have pinpointed Khrushchev as the instigator of the anti-Semitism, but it must, as with Timashuk, remain conjecture. Documents on such events were unlikely to be kept, and if they had been then they would have soon been neutralised. What is certain is that Khrushchev needed to destroy Beria; it was a matter of the minions playing for total power and a genuine fear that Beria remained influential in too many parts of the state control apparatus. There were so many forces at play in this frenetic scenario it is impossible to identify the factors with certainty.

During the previous year these minions of Stalin had already started to prepare for the future tussling for position without wanting to be seen as awaiting Stalin's death, the great unmentionable possibility, but undoubtedly at the forefront of his cohorts' minds. According to a ruling of 10th November 1952 the Presidium and the Bureau of the Presidium of Sovmin (Council of Ministers) were to be jointly chaired by Beria, Saburov and Pervukhin.* "Beria took advantage of Stalin's distractions elsewhere to hijack the Council of Ministers for his own ends. Organising sessions of the

* **Mikhail Pervukhin** (1904-1978) served under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. He was Chairman of the Council of Ministers (First Vice-Premier of the Soviet Union) from 1955-57. In 1959 he was Ambassador to East Germany.

Maksim Saburov (1900-1977) was a Soviet engineer, economist and politician. In 1921-26 he was Secretary to the Bachmut Komsomol Committee and headed Gosplan (State Planning Committee) three times. In 1947 he became a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and First Deputy Premier in 1955. He was a member of the failed effort to depose of Khrushchev in 1957.

Sovmin Presidium and the Bureau of the Presidium without consulting either of his co-chairs, Beria also structured agendas, cancelled voting, and steered pecuniary rewards, in the form of prizes, pensions and the awarding of flats and country houses, towards his own clients.”⁴⁵⁶ He was basically usurping the bureaucratic authority of Sovmin and investing it in his own people.

During what is now seen as Stalin’s end-days Khrushchev and many others, as mentioned in the history notes were becoming aware that Stalin was preparing yet another possible purge not only of the Jews, but his own political advisers. In December 1952 he dismissed Aleksandr Poskrebyshv who had been head of the secretariat for some twenty-five years, then ordered, as mentioned, the arrest of MGB General Nikolai Vlasik the long serving chief of his bodyguard, and his personal physician Dr Vinogradov who was obliged to confess involvement in the fictitious Doctors’ Plot. Stalin had been obsessed with the Doctors’ Plot carefully reading all the files and interrogations, even calling for Molotov’s wife to be recalled from her prison for further questioning. To the Stalin watchers the signs of another irrational purge appeared to be imminent as Stalin announced: “what will happen without me is that the country will die because you can’t recognise your enemies.”⁴⁵⁷

“The evidence suggests that Beria discovered, in the winter of 1952-3, that Stalin was planning to remove him” and “on the night of 1st to 2nd March when Stalin suffered a stroke Beria immediately began planning the succession.”⁴⁵⁸ It has been suggested that because Beria recognised the personal threats he was under he had organised Stalin’s death.⁴⁵⁹ This is very unlikely and Sudoplatov saw this claim as totally unfounded.

Beria later, when it was safe, brought the anti-Semitic witch-hunt to an end although it occasionally re-emerged later. As 1953 opened it was clear that the key players for power were beginning to plan for their futures, and they were making useful connections with others in the anticipated power struggle; those who could be either useful or jettisoned when required. Beria was the one man most of them feared the most. Stalin prior to his physical and mental collapse had made it clear that his successor was very much “in the air” and he would reject Beria out of his distrust of the man, and because he was not Russian. Kaganovich was Jewish, Voroshilov was considered too old, Mikoyan was an Armenian, and Khrushchev he considered “a country boy and Russia needed a leader from the intelligentsia;” each candidate for succession remained nervous with good reason.⁴⁶⁰ They had speculated that Stalin had fancied someone from the new generation and were slowly reaching the conclusion that only “a collective” leadership could succeed the great leader.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BERIA'S FALL, 1953

On March 1st the assistant warden of the dacha had found Stalin on the floor and “Malenkov and Beria, who were the first to be informed, arrived at 3.00 am on 2nd March, followed by Khrushchev at 7.30 am, and a group of doctors an hour later,” although it was claimed there were problems in finding Beria’s whereabouts.⁴⁶¹ Despite Stalin’s pre-death days of attacking his closest cohorts the inner circle remained intact with men like Malenkov, Beria, Bulganin, and Khrushchev, who quickly gathered like anxious vultures. When the somewhat astonished daughter of Stalin was brought to the scene she stated that she saw the attendant doctors and that the “Academician V. N. Vinogradov, who had looked after my father for many years, was now in jail—were making a tremendous fuss, applying leeches to his neck and the back of his head,” making the scene appear almost perversely bizarre.⁴⁶² The doctors who arrived were terrified of the prostrate body of the leader and the presence of the others, especially Beria.* The dentist called to remove Stalin’s false teeth dropped them on the floor in his state of nervousness, and his shaking hands could hardly undo Stalin’s shirt.⁴⁶³

The circumstances surrounding his death remain a mystery, but “new documents have recently turned up, but there will never be enough information to quiet doubters who insist that Beria or someone involved in a plot may have poisoned Stalin.”^{464/†} The fact remains that of the survivors of that day only Stalin’s daughter and Khrushchev have left memoirs of the occasion, and neither are entirely trustworthy about this episode.

* “Leeches were preferred for bloodletting, because the sharp fluctuations in blood pressure that would have resulted from bloodletting were considered undesirable.” See Brent J and V Naumov, *Stalin’s Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York, Harper Collins, 2003) p.318

† One of the more recent attempts to assess the medical evidence that Beria was involved can be found in Brent J and V Naumov, *Stalin’s Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York, Harper Collins, 2003) but they admit that “no hard empirical evidence supporting this has been unearthed to date.” p.314

The unanswered questions tend to focus on whether Stalin's death was precipitated by action or deliberate inaction, or just frightened confusion. The various accounts, "despite their discrepancies, suggest strongly that members of the leadership may have deliberately delayed medical treatment for Stalin—probably for at least ten or twelve hours—when they knew he was seriously ill."⁴⁶⁵ They made sure that this was concealed and there was probably no written evidence left to unearth, only personal observations which in this mutual conspiracy of silence would have been unlikely. All of them would have had good reasons for wishing Stalin dead as soon as possible, especially Beria who had been under constant threat. Out of all the top men Beria was the one who had the most reason to be concerned, because he realised the possibility that Stalin was about to eliminate him. This will always remain mere speculation to the delight of conspiracy theorists because even post-Stalin documentation cannot necessarily be trusted. Despite a greater openness after *glasnost* in trying to find precise details of what happened in the events surrounding Stalin's last hours, the details remain confusing.

Khrushchev, Stalin's daughter, and a few others have offered conflicting reports, but each with a personal agenda. Stalin's daughter hated Beria and with good reason, and she noted "there was only one person who was behaving in a way that was very nearly obscene. That was Beria. He was extremely agitated. His face, repulsive enough at the best of times, now was twisted by his passions—by ambition, cruelty, cunning and a lust for power and more power still. He was trying so hard at this moment of crisis to strike exactly the right balance to be cunning, yet not too cunning."⁴⁶⁶ Later she observed "all of them except the utterly degenerate Beria spent those days in great agitation, trying to help yet at the same time fearful of what the future might bring."⁴⁶⁷

Stalin had never liked being alone and in the evenings and would watch films with his cohorts to the early hours, because as Khrushchev noted "the main thing was to occupy Stalin's time so that he wouldn't suffer from loneliness. He was depressed by loneliness and feared it."⁴⁶⁸ On the night when he fell fatally ill Malenkov, Beria, Bulganin and Khrushchev had been present, Molotov and Mikoyan were absent being under a cloud. When they had left Beria travelled with Malenkov with whom, as noted earlier he was becoming conspiratorially close. It was Malenkov who had later suggested that Beria was with some woman when during the hours of panic no one could find him. When Stalin's closest cohorts arrived, no one summoned medical assistance, and no one can be certain as to how long Stalin had been on the floor, or whether medical assistance could have helped. In the event Beria, Malenkov and Khrushchev had returned to their own homes. When

they returned it was noted that Beria and Malenkov had slipped away together, and it was understandably presumed they were discussing a future without Stalin. Khrushchev, according to his memoirs “was well aware of Beria’s energy and his thirst for power.”⁴⁶⁹ As mentioned Beria’s behaviour during Stalin’s death hours was described by Stalin’s daughter as obscene, and Khrushchev painted a picture of Beria cursing Stalin until he thought he might recover; kissing his hand when there was a sense of life, and then back to cursing when the hand became limp. How far this was accurate is impossible to know because it is now well-known that Khrushchev hated Beria.

Molotov later claimed that Beria (on May 1st, 1951) told him he had been responsible for Stalin’s death “I did him in!” Beria boasted. “I saved all of you!”⁴⁷⁰ However, Khrushchev never mentioned this which he would have done if the possibility could have been even slightly evidenced. Amy Knight’s suggestion that the cohorts had just let him die sounds more reasonable, though, because of Beria’s nature, it is always possible he could have slipped some poison in his drink: it remains all pure speculation. Later an official report was made called *The History of the Illness of J. V. Stalin from March 2 to 5, 1953* which tends to favour the account by the doctors. Either way Stalin had made a grave miscalculation in thinking he could control Beria, Khrushchev, and Malenkov indefinitely.

It is a curious insight that inside Stalin’s desk there were only three items he kept locked away. The first related to his relationship with Tito, about the only so-called Communist leader who stood up against Stalin. The second was Bukharin’s letter pleading for mercy, and the third a letter of admonition from Lenin. “He would not have conserved [these items] in the desk unless it had echoed round the caverns of his mind.”⁴⁷¹ Stalin’s personal thinking defies the best of the biographers. There was an autopsy report, but it has never come to light. It was also clear from other evidence that his comrades had been right in the assumption he had been planning another purge. It transpired that Beria had his son Sergo trained as a pilot in case they needed to escape as a family.⁴⁷²

After Stalin’s death most of the would-be contenders were worried about Beria, because “each member of the Presidium knew that Beria held a potentially embarrassing dossier on him.”⁴⁷³ Even as Stalin’s body was verified as a corpse the possible battle-lines were taking shape with Malenkov closer to Beria, and Khrushchev moving alongside Bulganin. Apparently, Stalin’s house in a matter of hours was emptied in a frenzied house clearance and the staff dismissed.

However, the main issue was that Stalin had not named a successor or successors and there were no accepted procedures for such an appointment.

The bureau of the Presidium nominated by Stalin, namely Beria, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Pervukhin, Saburov and Khrushchev met during the night of March 4th and made immediate changes to Stalin's latest reforms, and they decided to do away with the enlarged Presidium. Khrushchev was naturally concerned as it appeared that Beria and Malenkov appeared to be taking charge, Beria nominated Malenkov as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Malenkov proposed that Beria be named as one of the first deputies. It was a tussle for power and Sudoplatov noted in April 1953 that "I noticed certain changes in Beria's behaviour. He openly criticised his colleagues in the Presidium while making telephone calls to Malenkov, Bulganin, and Khrushchev in my presence and that of other senior officers."⁴⁷⁴ However, these leaders were suddenly aware of public reaction for the first time and moved with caution in their power-play. During Stalin's lifetime any protest or opposition would have been shut down immediately and would not have arisen in the first place out of sheer fear. As such the tussling leaders tried to present a public image of unity. If they arrived in the same car it became essential that all the doors were opened simultaneously to avoid rumours as to who was the most important; it was all a cunning charade.

It could be regarded as the old guard amalgamating against the rise of Stalin's more recent appointments, or those who had run the state against those who were "of the Party." Khrushchev was obliged to stand back and watch the dismissal of some of his protégés such as Brezhnev. The Malenkov-Beria group and Khrushchev and his men tussled over their cohort appointees, holding their breath as others were dismissed or sidelined. In the immediate post-Stalin era it first began to appear that Malenkov was the leading replacement.

Beria was quick to ensure his control over the foreign and domestic side of his security empire was retained. This move by Beria also raised additional problems for contenders to Stalin's throne, because Beria had considerable armed support. He installed a close crony Vasili Stepanovich Ryasnoy as a new head of the Foreign Directorate, although this man had no experience in this area. The contenders for the throne probably had good reason to be nervous of Beria's machinations.

Khrushchev loathed Beria without publicly stating so during this time because he realised that he was a major contender for post-Stalin power and potentially dangerous. Consequently, Khrushchev and his self-serving reminiscences needed to be treated with caution. Beria was unpleasant but astute enough to know he was being observed by his rivals, but his error was in his self-perceived importance and underestimating the incipient power of Khrushchev. His potential opposition had narrowed somewhat to

those present because Molotov and other potential contenders had been previously side-lined. Beria had come close to similar treatment by Stalin, and in the previous November there had been a subtle down-grading of his status. This had been publicly demonstrated in the Stalin parade when portraits were carried of Stalin's advisers and Beria had slipped back several notches, but in 1953 he remained a powerful man, and although he was no longer minister of state security, he remained involved as a deputy minister.

As noted by outside observers as far as they could understand it appeared that Malenkov was going to take Stalin's place. In *Pravda's* article on the funeral arrangements Malenkov received the most coverage and pictures, and his speech was featured on page one, whereas Beria's and Molotov's contribution appeared side by side on page two. To all outward appearances Malenkov was in the ascendancy. The new leadership formulation all remained cautious, and they gave the impression of being like highly nervous chess players before a tournament, with false camaraderie on the surface. Each of the leadership team were allotted new tasks, and it was announced that Beria would head the Ministry of State Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs which had now become amalgamated. "Beria was now grabbing the most powerful levers of domestic coercion," and because of his wide-reaching powers he was a formidable presence.⁴⁷⁵

At Stalin's funeral, with Khrushchev as head of the organising commission, he introduced Malenkov who gave the principle eulogy and Beria and Molotov followed. It was claimed that both Beria and Molotov spoke officially without much reference to Stalin and more about the future, giving the impression they were already the men in power. However, it was noted that Beria's speech, "with his accent and his sharp, sometimes croaking intonations, displayed this absence of grief the most obviously."⁴⁷⁶ Beria hinted at the possibility of reform and stressed the multinational nature of the Soviet Union; at the funeral itself the leaders were beginning to set up their stalls. Nevertheless, despite the hope of reform it was dangerous for anyone to enjoy or rejoice at the death of Stalin, in public. Beria was a Georgian and the national diversity within the complex structure of the USSR was personally critical to him; he may have realised that his different ethnic ranking may preclude him from the top job for the moment, and this was probably why he connected himself to Malenkov.

By mid-March the press, especially *Pravda*, was playing down the Malenkov cult of potential leadership and put more emphasis upon the Central Committee as a whole. It was all a form of power-brokering which the outside world and the Russian public watched with anticipation. Most of these men realised that Stalin's regime had been oppressive, and Malenkov, Khrushchev and Beria realised it had become counter-

productive.⁴⁷⁷ However, it was Beria who surprised everyone by demanding a series of reforms which with his previous history seemed somewhat incredulous, but without being too cynical it was clearly a case of Beria expanding his public powerbase. Many of his proposed reforms prefigured Gorbachev but the other leaders knew Beria well, and they recognised his wide powers which made them nervous. However, it is worth noting that Sudoplatov in his memoirs argued that Beria was an innovator who would have brought about the unification of Germany in the 1950s, and may well have avoided many of the future international tensions.⁴⁷⁸ Sudoplatov's views are interesting and Beria's intentions may well have been reformative, but his motives were undoubtedly his way of securing power.

Beria conducted a purge of the foreign intelligence directorate and made his own appointments within the MVD (MGB). He needed to be regarded as a person who could liberalise the state and de-Stalinise the system if only to win popular support. Khrushchev had similar ideas about de-Stalinisation, but Beria forged ahead and probably with longer-term ramifications than the other leaders wanted.

He suggested common-sense economic reforms most especially putting a stop to many of the gargantuan building projects which had been for purposes of Stalin's self-glory rather than economic progress. He also attacked the continuous problem of agricultural collectivisation and the Agro-towns which had long been a Khrushchev policy, and which was widely derided, especially by the rural community. For some observers this may have appeared as hopeful and to all appearances Beria was a new man. Later there were some commentators who compared Beria to Yuri Andropov, Brezhnev's successor who was a policeman like Beria and who turned liberal, and whom many regarded as preparing for perestroika. It has been argued that Beria was in a good position to reform the State because he had already proved himself to be tough. However, to most who knew him then, and studied him since, this was a calculating and clever manoeuvre by Beria to stand out and be regarded as the man for the future.

After Stalin's death Beria had quickly established five commissions to review cases within Stalin's last years, with a special emphasis on the death of Solomon Mikhoels and the Doctors' Plot. Beria quickly established the Doctors' plot as a cunning and vile plan by Stalin, he even presented the documentary evidence to those colleagues prepared to sit and read them in the close guarded privacy of the Kremlin. There was the distinct impression that as Stalin blamed the past on Yezhov and others, now Beria was putting past misdeeds at the feet of Stalin.

He even looked to reforming the Gulag system looking to a transfer of the Gulag economic enterprises to civilian ministries. He convinced his

colleagues for a limited amnesty to so-called criminals which led to the release of some Gulag prisoners; it was a limited amnesty but the first ever. It applied to prisoners serving five years or less, pregnant women, juveniles up to eighteen years of age, and women over fifty and men over fifty-five plus the incurably ill. None of this applied to the political prisoners and those released were mainly petty criminals. In Sudoplatov's observations this made some areas risky with the return of the criminal element, and "no doubt the amnesty and the disruptions weakened his standing in public opinion."⁴⁷⁹ Perhaps more curious than Sudoplatov's views was the reference to "public opinion" which was re-emerging as something of importance.

Beria took the next step and named the killers of Solomon Mikhoels who had been quietly awarded medals, and he now demanded the medals should be taken back and they should be arrested. He was also busy ensuring the success of the Soviet hydrogen bomb and instructing Sudoplatov to coordinate plans for the sabotage of critical NATO bases. There was the distinct impression that the political leaders were trying to demonstrate that the future would be better under them.

All these leaders including Khrushchev had been docile servants to Stalin and in his name, they had committed brutal acts. It seems unbelievable that this was their moment of personal redemption, but more a political *volte-face* in so far that by casting blame onto Stalin, it established their credentials for their own positions. Nevertheless, it defies credulity that Beria wanted to change into a reformer or even a saint, unless it was for the same reasons as his colleagues; they were blaming Stalin by trying to look moderate and reasonable to the modern world. The leaders appeared to back Beria and show the world, in and out of the USSR, that Stalin's brutal police state was coming to an end.

For a time during the weeks following Stalin's death a massive effort was made to pretend that a collective leadership would reform the Communist state. Few of these would-be leaders, if any, were true Communists in the proper sense of the word, few were men of integrity, but most of the emerging so-called collective leaders were like beasts of prey waiting for the moment to seize power either individually, or as a selected cabal. In the immediate post-Stalin weeks these possible lines of inner-groupings remained uncertain and fluctuated wildly; however, there is no doubt they were all watching Beria who held the most power and who had moved with alacrity and purpose.

Within weeks of Stalin's death Beria involved himself with foreign policy, and by early April there were rumours that the USSR was seeking a

peaceful solution to the war in Korea and better relationships with the USA.* The Western powers were aware and curious about this apparent change of direction, and there was even a possibility of some form of reconciliation with the difficult Tito in Yugoslavia. (The irony was that just two days before he died Stalin had been discussing with Sudoplatov the possibility of having Tito killed.⁴⁸⁰) The distinct impression was that the Party basis was weakening in the face of State demands with which Beria had long been associated.

As mentioned earlier Beria had presented himself as the upholder of the different peoples which made up the USSR. Beria appeared as the defender of the rights of the various nationalities. Unsurprisingly Beria denounced Stalin's attack on the Mingrelian people (the so-called "Mingrelian Conspiracy") with little if any major consultation with the other leaders, and officers of state in that region were replaced by those of Mingrelian blood. The Moscow politicians towed Beria's line as he spread this policy across the USSR's various republics. For those involved under Stalin's regime it held all the appearances of a reforming witch-hunt. The usual rhetoric was employed, and Beria started to attack what he called Russian chauvinism and found support from those who wanted to hold the USSR together. This brought him back into conflict with Khrushchev who was angry that this new policy touched upon the Ukraine, where Khrushchev had a lifetime's involvement.[†]

On the surface it had always appeared that Beria and Khrushchev had been amiable to one another, but from the earliest of days they had been at loggerheads. Sudoplatov recalled a time during the early war years when Khrushchev had threatened him over the phone following an unpleasant conversation with Beria, who then turned on Sudoplatov berating him "with language I did not expect from a member of the Politburo."⁴⁸¹ The subject of the Ukraine was always sensitive if Khrushchev thought Beria were interfering. This was not helped when Beria proposed and initiated changes whereby Ukrainians took over the leadership roles, and he even started the promotion of religious freedom releasing the Primate of the Uniate Church

* Stalin had made a blunder in withdrawing from the UN over that body's refusal to accept China. It was during this time Truman had managed to persuade the UN to fight in Korea. Beria and Khrushchev had worried about America's reaction to the unpredictable Stalin, especially when Stalin ordered that Moscow be surrounded with anti-missile sites. Ironically it was to be Khrushchev who nearly brought on a global war during the Cuban crisis.

[†] Khrushchev had been born on the Russian side of the Ukraine border and saw the Ukraine as his personal responsibility as Beria regarded Georgia.

Yosyf Slipyi from his prison camp.* This was a total reversal of Stalin's and Khrushchev's policies and not the kind of liberal approach normally associated with Beria. His sudden reversal of policies and most especially his pro-nationalistic support was not confined to Georgia and the Ukraine but was initiated in the Baltic states and Belorussia. All were encouraged to assert their culture, language and take responsibility. The other leaders, even Khrushchev, were compelled to support Beria's reforms mainly because he held too much power to contradict; they probably felt that Stalin's ghost may re-emerge in the shadow of his henchman Beria.

Undoubtedly many had severe reservations about this sudden change, but it was Khrushchev who took a careful approach with cautious criticism, claiming in his own words to Malenkov, in the full knowledge that Malenkov and Beria supported one another; "Don't you see where this is leading? We're heading for disaster. Beria is sharpening his knives."⁴⁸² Beria was a calculating man who understood human passions, and to win over any opponents he suggested they all had dachas built at government expense in Georgia. This was met with approval but Khrushchev, who was as cunning as Beria, took Malenkov aside again and warned him that this was a Beria plot because to build these dachas other people would have to move, and this would cause resentment. Malenkov at first would not believe this about Beria, but as Khrushchev noted in his memoirs "this conversation started Malenkov thinking."⁴⁸³ This was an obvious attempt to try and drive a wedge in the arrangement of the Malenkov-Beria alliance. Khrushchev cannot be entirely trusted in his memoirs no more than Beria could had he written his, but it seems likely because at some point Malenkov started to move away from his political accomplice Beria.

The post-Stalin government appeared to have taken a new shape with a five-man Party Secretariat, which had followed the surprise announcement that Malenkov had resigned as secretary of the Central Committee. Khrushchev was slowly emerging as the leader and this was noted when he was listed first and not in alphabetical order. Malenkov remained premier, but he had no leadership within the party, and although Beria was the first deputy premier and head of internal police, he had no formal role among the party leaders; it was clear that Khrushchev was slowly emerging as more important.

* After Beria's fall Slipyi was returned to his imprisonment.



Walter Ulbricht

Among the main issues for the new leaders was the fermenting problems in the GDR, the Soviet portion of Germany. The East German economy was in sharp decline and there were next to no consumer goods for sale, and food was reaching a level which made life disagreeable if not unsustainable. Walter Ulbricht the Party leader and deputy prime minister and head of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) was activating some hard-line policies, especially in the economic sphere, and in the first four months of 1953 some 120,000 had risked crossing the border to the west.* Following Stalin's funeral Ulbricht had sought help from the Moscow leaders, but they had tried to warn him to be more conciliatory towards the needs of East Germany, but Ulbricht was a Party hardliner.

Beria reported a realistic account of what was happening in Germany to the Presidium. He proposed that the policy of the forced construction of socialism should be set aside; this raised more than a few eyebrows and was attacked by Molotov. Sudoplatov made the interesting claim that the original policy of a united Germany never originated with Beria, and that Stalin had considered this as an option in 1951, but agreed it was probably Beria's interference which caused the problems in East Germany.⁴⁸⁴ Beria had argued for a democratic and independent Germany, stopping the agricultural collectivisation, reducing the policy of eliminating private capital, improving the financial arrangements, and suggested a system to reform the judicial procedures and examine injustices. It is not difficult to

* "Close to 500,000 East German citizens had fled to West Germany since 1951," see Knight Amy, *Beria Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princetown: University Press, 1993) p.191

imagine the response of the Presidium members listening to Beria of all people proposing such far-reaching changes.

There was considerable controversy and Beria may have taken a step too far. It was just what Khrushchev needed, who along with Molotov accused Beria of turning against Socialism. Ulbricht was called to Moscow where a shouting match between Beria and Ulbricht ensued. Moscow had already announced that the military command in East Germany was to be recalled and a civilian administration was established under Vladimir Semenov, who was politically close to Beria. Moscow had eventually accepted what was dubbed the Beria document, and preparations were set in place to oust Ulbricht. Reforms were instantly announced despite protests from Ulbricht, and farmers who had fled West were promised their farms would be returned if they came back. The cost of consumer goods would, it was announced be reduced, and this along with other promises raised the expectations of the East German populace. It did not proceed at the pace the East German public had anticipated, and on June 16th there were street protests which soon spread beyond East Berlin. This turn of events all led to a clash between Moscow and East Germany, and the failure to manage Moscow's demands or the overall problem was self-evident.

"Beria's rivals for power did not applaud his efforts to moderate the Stalinist system," many of them had learned by experience to be suspicious of his motives.⁴⁸⁵ Beria continued to busy himself with making changes, trying to demonstrate that he was the necessary reforming politician. When a revolt broke out by the aggrieved workers in East Berlin the Russian military and its formidable tanks were instantly called in, which resulted in the deaths of twenty-one demonstrators. Beria's men on the spot were not up to the mark and it has been claimed Beria flew there to sort matters out. When he heard that the Presidium had been called at an unexpected moment his warning antennae were alerted, aware that East Germany had caused problems. He gave a cynical appraisal as to what had happened in Berlin which was contemptuous, and Molotov protested at "such an attitude to a friendly country."⁴⁸⁶ Beria's end-days were now in sight, not that he had any idea of the danger surrounding him; he had become too accustomed to his grip on power.

The East German revolt was a considerable and embarrassing scenario for Moscow, and Beria found himself accused of permitting a policy which could lead to the abandonment of East Germany. This was less than ten years after the war, and many felt that Germany remained a potential danger; there was still a visceral fear of German might. Many of Beria's reforms may have worked, and a united Germany with its new constitution in later decades functioned effectively without becoming a military threat, but Beria

in his haste to rise to overall power had reacted too rapidly. The initial problems in Germany had been brought about by Stalin's policies and were not entirely of Beria's making, but his solution was too far ahead of Moscow's timing. Some have tried to elevate Beria as a reformed man at this stage and far-seeing if not prophetic, but there seems little doubt that while his intentions may have been worthy, his motivations were still based on personal ambition. Beria was no democrat, he was a staunch Soviet man, but he belonged to the Machiavellian and Byzantium type Kremlin cliques trying to grasp power. He had given the opportunity to his fellow political contenders to claim that he was restoring capitalism which was far from the truth, but his sudden bout of liberalism failed for East Germany and for him. All it did in the end was provide "Khrushchev with a pretext for rallying opposition against Beria."

Khrushchev had long been carefully moving against Beria as he perceived him to be a serious threat. Later Khrushchev insisted that his actions against Beria had some moral foundations and not just "self-preservation. He had survived Stalin and now he had to outlive Beria."⁴⁸⁷ Very much as with Stalin's death, the precise details of Beria's downfall are obscured by various accounts which were often based on selected and sometimes self-serving memories of those involved. More information has since come to light and there are some minor deviations between Amy Knight's account written in 1993 and Rubenstein's book written some twenty-three years later.⁴⁸⁸ Such was the confusion that the belief that Beria was arrested at a meeting of the Presidium was challenged by Sergo his son who claimed he was arrested at home. Later Khrushchev would claim that although Malenkov chaired the meeting it was Khrushchev who stood and denounced Beria. What happened in the ensuing months remains as much of a puzzle as the details relating to the death of Stalin. It is generally and understandably assumed that Beria was making a bid for total power, but Sudoplatov noted that "it has now been established that Beria never plotted to seize power and overthrow the collective government. He had no power base within the bureaucracy" later adding that this belief was confirmed by Kiril Stolyarov, a scholar who saw Beria's file.⁴⁸⁹ In 1991 *Izvestia* published the minutes of the plenary session regarding Beria, apparently indicating from the speeches of the others (especially Khrushchev and Malenkov) that it was all intrigue by Beria's so-called comrades. It may take more decades for the truth to emerge, but it appears most likely that if Beria were not planning to take total control, he was making sure he was important amongst the collective group, and he certainly had his own formidable powers.

Khrushchev was all too aware of Beria's immense powers which included the security services, the border troops and so forth, and when

Beria attended the Presidium, he always came with his own bodyguard often consisting of ten to fifteen armed men. When Khrushchev started his *coup*, it had to be carried out in the utmost secrecy. Beria was not unaware that he had enemies, and he had unsuccessfully tried to enlist Molotov's support once he suspected that Malenkov was drifting away from his influence. Malenkov had developed the habit of becoming somewhat malleable if not biddable by other leaders, and Khrushchev had long recognised this weakness. Nevertheless, Voroshilov and Mikoyan were amongst Beria's supporters and were therefore kept in the dark, and for many others Beria's arrest took them by total surprise.

Khrushchev worked with Bulganin and they enlisted the help of General Moskalenko commander of the Moscow Air Defence and the famous Marshal Zhukov, who being military men had little time for Beria. During the time of the Stalin purges, and while the dictator had lived, the military, out of sheer self-preservation had constantly steered a clear line away from the political scene. However, the military commanders had political opinions, especially over the mayhem in Eastern Germany, and retained long memories of their fear of Beria and most of them, but not all, despised him.

Khrushchev knew he had to move with stealth to ensure that Beria could not summon help. A special Presidium was fixed for the 26th June and Khrushchev claimed he had arrived with a gun in his pocket. According to Khrushchev when Malenkov lost his nerve in answering Beria's question as to what was on the agenda "I jumped up and said: 'There is one item on the agenda; the anti-Party, divisive activity of imperialist agent Beria. There is a proposal to drop him from the Presidium and from the Central Committee, expel him from the Party, and hand him over to the court martial. Who is in favour?'"⁴⁹⁰ The others joined in the denunciations and Malenkov was supposed to have pressed a secret button which summoned Zhukov with armed soldiers, who had already brought into Moscow an armoured division in case of problems. This was one version probably somewhat coloured by Khrushchev.

It was undoubtedly Malenkov who had opened the proceedings by suddenly announcing that Beria's activities were to be examined. It was claimed, probably correctly, that Beria had tried to set one Presidium member against another, he had caused problems in Hungary, and in East Germany with his innovative approaches to the problems.* He then called on other members to voice their opinions and several commented on how

* Beria had wanted to reshuffle the Hungarian leadership and put forward Imre Nagy as a candidate for prime minister: Nagy had been an NKVD agent.

Beria had often tried to promote himself at their expense, and then Khrushchev weighed in with his habitual crude invective. Khrushchev accused Beria of the amnesty for camp inmates, stating that "Beria was trying to legalise arbitrary rule and that no honest Communist would ever behave the way he does in the Party."⁴⁹¹

It was at this point Malenkov then pressed a secret button and armed men entered through all the entrances, and Beria was led away at the point of a gun. He was taken under an escort including tanks to a military cellar beneath an orchard. His belt and trouser buttons had been removed and in this humiliating predicament he had to grip his trousers giving him no chance of escape; though with the military around him he would not have escaped even with a handgun. Stalin's daughter wrote that "General A. A. Vishnevsky, Chief Surgeon of the Soviet Army, told me that Beria, after his arrest, had been kept for a few days in the basement of the General Staff Building in Moscow, and had been shot there ten minutes after sentence was pronounced."⁴⁹² The room under the orchard was probably the same place.* There was still a genuine fear that the *coup* would fail because many in the Presidium were taken by surprise, and there were angry objections from a General Maslennikov (a first deputy chief of the MVD) and Vlasik (Stalin's old guard recently released from prison), but they were persuaded to go away, and later others complained, but they were shut down. "Beria's arrest was, then, a highly risky operation that succeeded more by luck than anything else. The *coup* plotters, improvising as they went along, were in considerable danger for the next few days, until the Beria forces could be subdued, and any potential challenges resisted."⁴⁹³ To ensure their safety huge numbers of troops and military equipment suddenly appeared on the streets of Moscow to the curiosity of various foreign embassies. Beria suddenly disappeared and Sudoplatov realised the next day that the picture of Beria which normally hung in the reception room had disappeared.⁴⁹⁴

* It seems clear that they took Beria to the garrison guardhouse at Lefortovo prison, then for safety reasons transferred him to an underground bunker under the apple orchard mentioned to Stalin's daughter.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AFTER BERIA'S ARREST

As soon as Beria was under lock and key his family and some supporters were locked up elsewhere. His wife Nina spent nearly a year in prison. The CC Presidium met again on the 29th of June to decide the next step, and it was clear that at this stage they were holding Beria under political charges. It was a delicate situation because Beria still retained some support in the MVD, and therefore it was decided that this organisation containing so many of Beria cohorts should be excluded. Arresting one of their own had not been easy. Beria had been given many prestigious awards including five Orders of Lenin, Hero of Socialist Labour, two Orders of the Red Banner and others. The arrest was technically incorrect according to the State tradition, but during the time of Stalin such technicalities were ignored. Their main fear, beyond Beria's supporters, was that Beria in a public defence could also involve the conspirators in their own murky past, especially during the time of the purges. It was decided the judicial machinery should be in their favour, so Marshal Moskalenko was appointed to oversee the investigations, and the Procurator-General who knew Beria well was replaced by a friend of Khrushchev, Rudenko, who had held this post in the Ukraine. As noted earlier, Beria's closest associate Merkulov was permitted his freedom if only to cooperate in the initial stages by revealing all he knew about Beria. He did this to save his own skin by presenting himself in the best possible way.

Many of Beria's other protégés and supporters were arrested, especially his Georgian henchmen both inside and outside Georgia. These arrests were carefully manipulated to ensure that Beria's main supporters were under lock and key. Meanwhile, others were moved or allowed to survive if the conspirators thought they would toe the line for their own safety. From his cell Beria wrote a series of grovelling letters asking for mercy, apologising, and requesting that he be allowed to work in some minor post where he would prove his worth. His paper and pencils were removed from his cell.

However, the conspirators knew that the Central Committee needed to give its formal sanction if they were to be successful and be regarded as legitimate. It would have been easy to have followed Beria's traditional way

of working and had him shot, using the excuse he had tried to escape, or he had died from an illness or even committed suicide, but they were acutely aware that the rest of the world was watching with amazement at this sudden upheaval. Hitherto their strategy had been one of demonstrating a unified command to replace Stalin and show the world their Communist system worked, but now they were faced with the major issue of public relations.

To overcome this problem a carefully planned offensive was orchestrated when the Central Committee of over two hundred members met in a secret session between the 2nd and 7th of July. The proceedings were noted but held in secret and the records were not seen until decades later in 1991. These papers revealed a picture of events “surrounding Beria’s arrest, making it clear that Beria’s opponents were still on very shaky ground [given their own behaviour] at this point and were thus pulling out all the stops to contrive a criminal case against Beria, and persuade the Central Committee members that they had done the right things.”⁴⁹⁵ The whole scenario was cleverly devised and each speaker rose to explain why this action was both necessary and legal.



Khrushchev

The session was chaired by Khrushchev, but he astutely left Malenkov as the front man to lead the proceedings. This would have led to a few raised eyebrows given that it was well-known that for a decade Beria and Malenkov had walked hand in hand through the political minefield of the Stalin years, and the immediate post-Stalin months. Malenkov raised the

issue that Beria had used the MVD for his own political ambitions, had collected information on Party members, and had misused his power in East Germany and Yugoslavia. The point that would have gripped the attention of many of those listening was the well-known fear that Beria had accumulated personal files on many of those present. Malenkov also tried to clarify why the deed had been done in such a clandestine way. He explained the reason to be the need for the leaders to keep a sense of unity within the Party, which would have brought a wry smile to the face of the more discerning. Khrushchev was the next to the floor going over similar ground, but with added barbs, even bringing up the old rumour that Beria had spied decades before on behalf of the Musavat, but this time in a tone of absolute authority. He also attempted to explain his hitherto friendship with Beria with his sense of humour, explaining how on the surface all seemed like a happy family, and describing how he and Malenkov shared a car with Beria and “saying goodbye, ‘he squeezed my hand, and I responded with a warm handshake: well, I thought, you fraud, this is the last handshake. Tomorrow at two o’clock we will be waiting for you. [laughter] We won’t shake your hand, we’ll put your tail between your legs.’”⁴⁹⁶ In this fashion Khrushchev explained the friendship as the only way as to deal with a provocateur as he now addressed Beria. It was apparent to the conspirators and to the listeners that the situation was politically delicate.

Beria’s opponents had examined his life with a toothcomb and there were charges relating to the war in which, because of Beria’s intelligence work in planting disinformation amongst the Germans, he was accused of trying to liaise with them to overthrow Stalin.⁴⁹⁷

Molotov was more measured and focused on Beria’s foreign policy which Molotov had been genuinely concerned about in this his field of expertise. Molotov was angry about Beria’s intrusion into East Germany and tampering with the difficult relationships with Yugoslavia. Bulganin thrust the corporate sword deeper with the painful twist that Beria was a spy and asked why it was necessary for Beria to have armed MVD troops with Russia already well-equipped with the army. Kaganovich in his address used the highly emotive word “counterrevolutionary” which insinuated a charge of treason.

Speaker after speaker left the listeners battered by a barrage of charges, and even those who held less stringent views on Beria had to play it safe and join the attack for their own survival. Shatalin a CC Secretary painted a sensational picture of Beria’s sexual appetite and behaviour, including that he had syphilis and illegitimate children. For safety reasons and self-preservation many of Beria’s better known protégés spoke against him, and many escaped because of their connivance, unlike his oldest cohort Bagirov,

who part way through his speech was interrupted because it was stated he was simply trying to save himself; it failed because he was later arrested and executed in April 1956 following his trial.

There were major inconsistencies and self-evident lies which since the notes of the meeting came to light indicate that the listeners at the time must have seen through. No questions were raised about the nature of the arrest and its legality, but it was more like a theatre-stage where the conspirators justified their actions. By the end of the trial on July 7th the Central Committee approved that Beria had to be expelled from the Party and was to stand trial on criminal charges. The whole episode placed the military in a stronger position than it had held during Stalin's day.

Beria was amoral and a person with no human compassion, and undoubtedly his calls for reform were based on his life-long ambitions for power. However, the irony is that he was condemned for not being a Communist which he most certainly was, and for spying which was out of the question. He was accused by men who although not as horrific as him were part of the same pattern which was why Beria's part in the purges was never mentioned; this would have been too close to home for his accusers who were tarred with the same brush.

Beria's arrest was not announced until 10th July, and it was just before Christmas before anyone heard that Beria and six co-conspirators had stood trial, announcing he had worked for British intelligence, but no mention was made of mass murders which would have been too embarrassing.* However, before this could be completed some form of machinery had to be established to give a sense of State justification and a sense of legitimacy to the conspirators. Beria's hands were covered in blood, and his sudden reforming zeal was no different from that of Khrushchev, but all those who were trying to remove him were tainted in many and various ways.

The first signals for the more discerning public was that Beria's name suddenly disappeared, and then the political onslaught started with claims that Beria wanted to place the MVD above the government. It sounded as if Beria had been prepared to hand East Germany over to the Americans, planned a return to capitalism, but it was clear that Beria was not by and large out of step with his colleagues. Beria was not helped by the fact that just after his arrest Russian tanks were used to resolve further East German riots.

* "Beria thus became, following Yagoda and Yezhov in the 1930s, the third head of the KGB to be executed for crimes which included serving as an imaginary British secret agent." Christopher A and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) p.351

The news of Beria's arrest caused astonishment overseas, especially in the West, and to a degree concern, some wondering whether it portended the end of the regime. In a Gulag prison camp Solzhenitsyn said the news came like a "thunderclap" as it must have done all round the Soviet Union. Pictures of Beria were everywhere in the prison camps but suddenly disappeared. Some political prisoners wrote to the leadership informing them how they had been treated by Beria and beaten by him personally. *Pravda* announced that Beria was to be expelled from the Party, which surprised those who had hoped that Beria, despite his ominous background, was the man who would reform the political structure and make life better. Khrushchev and others were aware that unrest may result and ordered that the various reactions were monitored, with the majority response appearing to be the question as to "who were they all to believe?" This was not surprising given that the Kremlin machinations were widely known. Following Stalin and other prominent leaders, including Beria, there had been a degree of public scepticism about official announcements. His posters and pictures disappeared overnight and there were rumours that a military coup was under way. Most people relaxed after a time and correctly regarded the whole incident as another power struggle among the leading echelons. The ordinary citizen was more interested in food on the table and personal safety. There were also those who had known of Beria's background and reputation and thought him an unlikely reformer.

The reaction in Georgia was different; Beria had made many enemies in his home territory, and his name still instilled a sense of fear, but the place was full of his protégés, and even for the most cynical Beria had stood up for Georgia and Transcaucasia rights. Nevertheless, his pictures were removed, and streets and avenues named after him were scrubbed out and often replaced with Malenkov's name.* There followed a purge of Beria's henchmen, although the conspirators moved cautiously and took their time not wishing to cause unrest.

The MVD's foreign intelligence agency had a change of chief and many of Beria's agents abroad were agitated by the news in the countries where they were working. Foreign diplomats and those watching Beria's agents noted this sudden change. In Australia the MVD agent Vladimir Petrov defected noting that "what is certain is that Beria was the loser in a naked struggle for supreme power which is not yet ended."⁴⁹⁸ Petrov also believed that Beria was the most natural successor for Stalin. There were other

* Later in 1956 when there were riots against Moscow rule pictures of Stalin and Beria were waved in demonstrations.

defections as in Japan, and a sense of relief in the East German Communist party; with the fall of Beria the hardliner Ulbricht was returned to power.

The collapse of Beria also created headlines in the West especially those who believed that Beria had started the more reconciliatory approach. There was a great deal of understandable ignorance of what was happening, and many thought Malenkov was the potential leader and gave Khrushchev little attention.

Beria's name was hardly mentioned in public but unquestionably behind the scenes the conspirators were active in ensuring the trial would be quick and effective. It was not until December 17th that the announcement was made that Beria and six of his accomplices would be facing an official trial. The trial was held in secret and presided over by a World War military commander called Ivan Konev on December 18th. It was not the normal composition for a Soviet court, it was not a state or a military court but a political judgement seat. Others were tried at the same time including Dekanozov, Merkulov and others all deemed to be Beria's network.⁴⁹⁹ The various charges were far-ranging and included Beria's attack on the collectivisation policy of the farm system, creating food shortages, and generally raising dissent within the country.* These were followed by the old charges he had spied for the Musavat, worked for the Mensheviks, had contacted enemy intelligence agencies, and worked with Georgian dissidents living abroad. He was also indicted for working with counterrevolutionary elements during the civil wars.

Beria had not been arrested for his crimes, but because he had accrued too much power, and was a threat to other would-be leaders. Once these various charges were made public there followed a national denunciation of Beria and his activities, and public meetings and newspapers joined in the condemnation. Ironically there were many reasons why Beria should be condemned as the henchman of Stalin, who in postwar legal terminology was guilty of crimes against humanity and genocide, but the actual charges were trumped up political charges to cover the backs of the accusers, and to justify their actions. Whatever the feelings about the man Beria it was evident he was no spy and he was a Stalinist communist, and he was condemned by men who had participated in similar evil deeds. His real crimes were never mentioned. As noted, the trial was held in *camera* for obvious reasons, and only the results were reported to the press on Christmas Eve with the news that Beria would receive the highest criminal punishment, namely death.

* The chief prosecutor was Rudenko who had served on the Nuremberg Trial during the prosecution of Göring.

Rumours abounded that Beria had been dead for some considerable time, even months before, but it is most likely that he attended the trial.* Had Beria been killed before it was unlikely that the huge number of files for the trial would have been prepared. Khrushchev himself muddied the waters of speculation later, but it is generally believed that after the trial ended on December 23rd Beria was taken to a cell, handcuffed to an iron ring where he was shot by the senior officer and then by four others. The American Ambassador Charles Bohlen pertinently reported that “there is of course elementary justice in the fate of Beria and his associates, but it would have been more fitting if retribution had been meted out by his victims rather than his accomplices.”⁵⁰⁰

Unlike in Stalin’s day Beria’s family survived after a brief imprisonment, but certain restrictions were placed on them. Beria had been feared by many because of his extreme brutality, his Machiavellian machinations, and his self-seeking power grasping, and although he was an extreme example there were others amongst those who stood in judgment who had similar backgrounds, but Beria had become the sacrificial lamb as they carried out their exorcism. After his death and “as a symbol of his non-personhood, the editors of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia sent out a discreet notice to all their subscribers recommending that they cut out with a small knife or razor blade the entry on Beria.”⁵⁰¹ They offered a replacement article on the Bering Sea, and thus an attempt was made to make the exorcism retrospective as if Beria had never existed.

Himmler is often depicted as one of the most wicked of a tyrant’s henchmen, but Beria in many ways surpassed him in cruelty and general immorality. History is littered with men like Beria and Himmler, and they are still lurking on the human stage to this day. Most observers when they read about such people are simply aghast at the levels of cruelty to which they descended. Their depravity was so insidious it would be difficult to write a convincing novel about such an individual. The question about the moral dilemma must be asked as to why and how such men act and react the way they did, simply because they are so far beyond normal human experience. The final part of this book utilises this history and biography to raise questions about the moral dilemma humanity faces, especially in times of social unrest and war.

* His son Sergo remained convinced his father had been killed earlier in the year.

PART THREE

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND FREE WILL

INTRODUCTION

Having published six historical biographies, one on a morally upright Luftwaffe engineer, another on a Luftwaffe Field Marshal condemned to death for mass-murder, another on General Franco, and three about Nazi war leaders condemned as war criminals, it seemed appropriate to ask some fundamental questions which would act as guidelines in understanding the nature of such men, and the perplexing dilemma of how they could be so immoral.

Beria was the infamous servant of Stalin, who had suggested and organised the Katyn massacre, enlarged the Gulag camp system, was regarded even in his day as a moral reprobate, and it is claimed that he was “the most feared man in the Soviet Union during the Second World War.”⁵⁰² He was the pro-active servant of Stalin who had ordered the murder of millions of innocent people and their families, while smoking his “Dunhill pipe” from behind the safety of his desk; always keeping his distance. Beria followed him, encouraged him, and suggested other similar barbarous actions. The question must be asked as to whether Beria was just downright immoral, or as we might term it evil, and if so, what drove him. The background history of a country is important because it raises the question of whether it is a matter of a rotten apple or a rotten barrel; how far is the individual personally morally responsible?

In trying to understand what makes an individual extremely immoral raises queries about what is meant by the term evil, which in turn raises questions about the circumstances which created such malevolence. Evil as a term has had many definitions and is a broad concept, but in everyday usage it is generally understood in terms of behaviour which is so immoral and depraved it shocks normal people. In describing a person as evil, we tend to look towards an unbalanced behaviour involving elements such as revenge, hatred, anger, selfishness, a warped love of power and dominance, all of which show no compassion for the suffering of others. In this sense it is when a person’s immorality reaches such serious depths that it descends to the level commonly described as evil. The biography of Beria appears to fit, at least on the surface, the requirements of this bizarre and sad human dilemma.

Solzhenitsyn wrote that all human beings can rise and fall through the scales of bad behaviour to goodness, “but as long as the threshold of evil-

doing is not crossed, the possibility of returning remains, and he himself is still within reach of hope.”⁵⁰³ Solzhenitsyn suggested that evil was a behaviour that was so barbaric and far-reaching it became irredeemable. Later he wrote that “the ultimate...is when evil is so utterly condemned that even the criminal is revolted by it,” when normal human beings have realised the threshold has been crossed from bad or immoral behaviour to one of downright evil.⁵⁰⁴ The systematic massacre of innocent men, women, and children as well as babies is not just immoral, it passes beyond that threshold and is best described as evil. It may well be in the study of evil and its origins that there are mere indicators, no solutions. Most importantly when immorality is so gross, that when a person’s behaviour is so appalling it goes beyond the point of no-return, when no redemption is possible, then it seems reasonable to state evil exists.

For theologians there are two types of evil; the moral evil which is the transgression of moral laws, and non-moral evil which includes disasters such as earthquakes, famine and disease. The latter component is caused because we live in a world of stone, water and fire and thus accidents will happen; “acts of God” as lawyers refer to them. In contrast the evil which concerns this study of Beria concerns a person’s immoral behaviour especially when it becomes so degenerate it creates or becomes evil.

It will also be necessary to ask whether any individual is entirely responsible for their personal behaviour and what makes a person evil. Many and various academic disciplines have been utilised and claimed by some to be able to explain the phenomenon of evil. These different disciplines range from psychology, sciences, criminology, law, to religion and philosophy. In trying to account for serious immorality the scientific and psychological studies tend to produce reasons for an individual’s reactions and reflexive responses, but do not account for evil. Jurisprudence simply offers a structure, and Criminology looks for reasons of conduct. Religious insight offers a description of evil and some important insights, but it is in the discipline of philosophy and the study of “free will” that a possible meaningful insight can be found for both the causes for evil, and man’s individual choice in such matters.

The major question will be as to whether Beria and people like him were simply a product of their time and age, pre-wired in their behaviour, or were they downright wicked? The critical question of free will must be explored and the important influences that bear upon a person’s character will be pursued. There has been a growing tendency in the modern world to denigrate humanity’s free will as if it never existed. The highly popular historian Harari has forecast its closure, and even gene-research scientists have given the impression that we are mere copies of a previous brand of

our ancestors. This author will try and tackle the issue by looking at man's experience of his own self-consciousness with an appeal that humanity stands apart from the plant and animal kingdom, by an ability to be reflective and think.

It will be argued that despite the enormous influences which bear on the human mind, freedom of choice remains critical for humanity to retain any sense of self-worth. This Part Three will therefore argue that the much maligned free will is critical, but the final analysis in Part Four will illustrate how free will can be suppressed under certain circumstances yet remain important for humanity's identity. The main contention is that a person is a free agent, people have free will and freedom of choice, and are morally responsible for their actions, albeit that freedom can sometimes be suppressed by external and internal factors. Naturally much of this will relate to Beria but will hopefully provoke questions about other major historical figures, and today's universal political instability.

CHAPTER ONE

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Psychology, often used to explain immoral behaviour, had its origins in Leipzig Germany in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt founded the first research centre. The study of biology is older, and bio-chemistry and gene research is much more recent. Moral philosophy and theology go back nearly three thousand years and their insights into the nature of evil must not be glossed over; they are highly pertinent to understanding the nature of humanity. These two disciplines provide more meaningful answers to the question as to why immoral behaviour can descend to evil, leading to personal and national ramifications. The other academic pursuits at their very best only provide tenuous answers, and they mainly account for a person's immediate reactive responses and not humanity's thinking processes.

The religions of the world have provided various explanations for the evil of man. The ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism viewed existence as a struggle between the powers of darkness and light and regarded evil as an integral and powerful force. Islamic belief explains everything in the light of Allah's will, in which an enervating fatalism is based upon the doctrine of the "Will of Allah."

From their very beginning Judaism and Christianity have fought with the issue of man's evil. The Austrian Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, studied the early texts of Genesis (held dear by Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and used these ancient accounts to demonstrate man's early struggles with the nature of evil.⁵⁰⁵ Buber examined the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden tree of knowledge, and interpreted the fratricidal Cain as "the story of the first iniquity in the human sense," and "a deed which is wrong by its very nature."⁵⁰⁶ Buber made it clear that from the earliest of times it was understood that man was well aware of what was good and evil, and he placed the responsibility for evil at the feet of man as a free agent.*

However, accounting for the existence of evil in a world created by a good God has posed difficulties through the ages. The medieval Christian

* Buber renounced his professorship at Frankfurt am Main after Hitler took power in 1933 and left for Jerusalem.

theologian Aquinas argued that since God created “everything in existence,” evil cannot have been created by God as an independent force often epitomised as Satan. This would be contrary to the nature of God. Evil was in his thinking the absence of good, making moral evil a privation of the good, but for many Christians the question as to why God allows evil to exist persists. Some Christians understandably argue that God in creating humankind apart from animals, did so by endowing them with free will. This was an absolute gift and could not be withdrawn. Therefore, when people make the wrong decision and create evil situations it is their misuse of God’s gift. If a man aims a gun at another with the intention of killing, God can not withdraw his gift by fouling the mechanism or twisting the barrel; free will means it is *me who chooses*. Man must live by the consequences of his own actions.

Nevertheless, the existence of evil causes problems for many in their belief in God and the existence of evil has long been studied, but not entirely explained to everyone’s satisfaction. The theologian Karl Barth refused to discuss evil claiming if God is God man could not dispute the order of things; this on the surface appears to be side-stepping the question, or it might imply that we are only finite beings and we cannot know whether evil exists because it may possibly have some form of God-like purpose. It has been argued by Christianity and other faiths that humanity can only become God-like or mature through the struggle against evil challenges.

However, in understanding the nature of man and his potential for evil the pursuit of religion has produced some powerful insights. It has long been argued that God created man as a “free agent” meaning he has free will. The nature of free will is implicit in the Christian scriptures and therefore very much alive in the Western legal system, with the necessity of proving *mens rea* (guilty mind, in terms of a wrong intention). St Augustine argued for free will stating that God foreknows all things, but this does not deprive us of freedom of choice, and we are all too conscious of when we go wrong.⁵⁰⁷ The message of Jesus Christ and his forerunner John the Baptist was to repent, to change, to look back at previous behaviour and become good. Implicit in this message is the demand that this is an internal change of direction made by the individual in their inner-thinking, and therefore becomes a matter of free choice; one can choose not to repent.

This sense “of knowing we have gone wrong” might possibly explain why some people are wracked by guilt which comes from our conscience, which haunts us as a consequence of wrong decisions. The German theologian and martyr of the Nazi regime, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer when giving some theological lectures in Berlin in 1933 (as Hitler assumed power) said “it is not the purpose of the Bible to give information about the

origin of evil but to witness to its character as guilt and is the infinite burden of man," later adding that "before the Fall there was no conscience."⁵⁰⁸ Solzhenitsyn wrote that "Macbeth's self-justifications were feeble—and his conscience devoured him," and he added that nearly every person has a conscience of one sort or another.⁵⁰⁹ Conscience and guilt can be a variable factor; a Christian's conscience can be influenced by his reading of the Bible, a Moslem by his understanding of the Koran, and a cannibal can feel bad about letting a victim escape his clutches. Nevertheless, the study of religion indicates that conscience and subsequent guilt imply that there exist a set of rules or guidelines by which we tend to measure our behaviour and contravening them creates a sense of guilt. This insight also indicates that man therefore has a choice in the way he behaves or reacts; a person may choose to follow their perceived standards or decide to deviate.

In theology and philosophy, the most powerful arguments to explain the eruption of evil is that free will is the single factor which creates immoral behaviour and produces evil people and situations. There is no need for a Satan, or some form of external malevolent force, because humankind has personal freedom of choice which is capable enough for creating evil not to need a Satan as an explanation or excuse.

However, there are contrary arguments and free will in some philosophical schools is opposed by various forms of "Determinism" which claims that free will is a meaningless term. The question raised is how can humans do anything except as a mechanical response arising from their environmental and hereditary inheritance? This viewpoint could be seen to encapsulate the problems raised by human bio-chemistry, biological instincts, and psychology which will be examined later in the text. Determinists would then add sociological aspects such as personal history, and many other background factors which is the well-known "nature and nurture" debate.

Philosophically the term "Determinism" is often taken as a general thesis about the world that every single event is necessitated by earlier events; a part of a causal or connecting chain of reactions. It often gives rise to cyclic theories of history that one type of action will inevitably be followed by its predictable successor. This viewpoint becomes highly significant in the moral sphere, when it is argued that all our mental states and decisions are necessitated by preceding causes. Extreme forms of this thinking are sometimes referred to as "incompatibilists" who claim that determinism, if true, destroys moral responsibility.

If taken to its natural conclusion determinism means no one can be guilty of any crime or accused of being evil because a person is merely a bundle of automatic reactions to forces beyond their control. The question of moral or legal blame then becomes questionable. The consequence of this is that

prisons should only be used as a means of restraint and not as a means of punishment. Human experience, it is argued, tends to indicate that many of our behavioural and emotional responses are automotive reflexes responding to our psychological, physical make-up, past-choices, nurture, and a myriad of other factors which could predict the way we react and even think.

This philosophical argument was challenged by the philosopher G. E. Moore who wrote that a person is free in performing an action "if I could have done otherwise."⁵¹⁰ Moore implied that many actions result from effective choices by the perpetrator who is free to decide. This is the critical point that fundamentally people have free will, and because they knew they had choices there is an *inner self-awareness* of this all-important issue.

It has been further argued that in the major choices in life involving moral decisions of any magnitude, human beings possess an ability to pause and use their reasoning powers of choice. There exists a self-awareness that in some critical moral situations we do have alternative responses which we tend to ponder and act upon. Students of philosophy have struggled for generations to define the issue of free will, and one of the best exponents in this writer's experience was C. A. Campbell in a series of lectures delivered at the University of St Andrews in the early 1950s, and later published under the title *On Selfhood and Godhood*. Campbell was convinced that there is "a distinctive kind of self-activity involved in moral decision" and our business is to understand this issue.⁵¹¹ Campbell's style of delivering his argument was complex and intended for students of philosophy and his arguments are too intricate for a brief survey of this nature.* At a base-level his argument suggested that when humans commit themselves to any form of introspection they know that in their inner mental/spiritual self-activity there are decisions of a moral nature that human-beings work their way through. To put it another way, when humans are faced by a serious question, usually of a moral nature, they retain the ability to consider the ramifications of their proposed course of action.

However, Campbell notes everyone has "emotive and conative dispositions which we call his character...and it is in this inner system, this character, which determines what desires will emerge in response to a given situation."⁵¹² If we know a person well enough it is quite possible to predict that person's reactions to a given situation. It is true that a person's character will often formulate the responses they make, and their choice can follow their strongest or habitual desire. It has been argued that a person cannot be responsible for what his ingrained character opts for, in fact it is sometimes

* Campbell uses the term "self," but it could also mean "mind" or "Spirit" or "Soul" and a myriad of other expressions to define that inner-part which makes us who we are.

argued, as previously noted that he has no choice and cannot be responsible for his actions. The response here is could a person have chosen otherwise? It is this issue which raises the fundamental question of moral responsibility.

It is possibly true that in everyday decisions a character's responses can be predictable in some situations, automatic reflexes brought about by upbringing or coerced external forces which will be examined in Part Four. However, in the case of free will, according to Campbell, freedom of choice operates in a narrowly defined space of activity, namely that area when decisions of some significant moral magnitude are considered. These are the moments when "we weigh up the situation" and our introspective element innately knows we have choices; deep down when we know later that we could have made a different decision. Our character may have developed strong desires, perhaps alcohol, drugs, sex, power, and myriads of other cravings, and the formed character can be a major factor in determining choice, but we know, the inner-self knows, we can make alternative decisions. This is often the only method of escaping drug or alcohol addiction; the impulse must be *our* choice even if it is a struggle. Any reflective human-being can test this idea with what Campbell termed "introspection." We have all experienced that mental/spiritual process when we are aware that our desires clash with what we perceive to be our duty or the right thing to do; it can be a serious tussle.

The inner-self can also be aware of our own peculiar character formulation. A person may know that if they are prodded in the chest by an angry opponent their normal reaction is to strike the aggressor; this is their character to date which can make them predictable to others as well as to their own self-awareness. However, this very knowledge means an inner-self exists, and a person is capable of fashioning and re-fashioning their character because people are aware and alert to their almost automatic responses. A person may fight against his or her own inclinations and known habits. Humans know they can and may respond in a different way. It is in areas of moral responsibility that the nature of free will plays a major role. It is a freedom when the "self" can take into consideration its hereditary leanings, the environment and the formed character, and still make a different choice.

When a man stands before a judge and states "he was not himself at the time of the incident" he is often referring to the inner-self which makes the final decision, not that this is a defence in law. Many of our everyday decisions can be based on the sort of character we have become making our reactions predictable, but our *introspection* clearly informs us there is a *self* within us which has a freedom of movement, even allowing us to reform our character to date by making a different decision. This is essential for

humanity to remain humanity rather than a mere reactive coral reef. People are free to choose, indicating they are not leopards and can change their spots; this is the fundamental core of humanity. This exercise of free will nearly always tends to operate in major moments of decision making, frequently involving moral responsibility. It must be a major moral decision; a person choosing between their favourite foods or drinks or music rarely ponders the decision; if asked about being prepared to rob, rape, kill or deceive, people do stop and reflect on their decision.

The exercise of free will does not mean the right decision will be made. Campbell notes that “a man with a passion for power may have resolved to devote all his talents and energies, and to subordinate every other claim, including the claim of morality, to the achievement of this objective,” but he is still aware of choices.⁵¹³ If a person knowing they have a choice decides to ignore their own judgement as to what he feels is right, and murders people on instructions from above he has used his free will to generate evil. The moral verb “ought” can be used in different ways, from “I ought to do what is right by what I think is morally correct” to “I ought to do what I have been instructed to by my superior, be it Hitler or Stalin.” Common human experience nevertheless clearly indicates that there is a freedom of will, a freedom of choice in major moral matters, even if the subject turns away from a normal moral position. This is when such a man knows what he feels to be morally right or wrong. Campbell wrote in his lectures: “the existence in man of a moral consciousness, a consciousness of unconditional obligation, of a categorical imperative, I now propose to take as established.”

In this writer’s mind the adherents of free will not only hold the better arguments against those who claim we are a bundle of mere reactions, but each person’s considered reflections should confirm this view; it is a common human experience which cannot be ignored. We know that plant life needs its own special environment in which to flourish, and animals nearly always react according to inbuilt instinct and outside pressure. It is humanity’s free will and reasoning powers which alone separates them from animals, (as noted by Lord Devlin below in the sub-chapter on jurisprudence) and at times makes human behaviour much worse than the most dangerous of animals. A person can be aware that their early childhood instincts, their nurture, genes, training, their psychological tendencies, and a myriad of other factors incline them to a predictable action or reaction, but they can stop and think and choose a different course for a variety of reasons. Human beings can be aware of their own tendencies and choose to ignore them. From this perspective humans are free in their major actions, it explains the common phenomenon of conscience. However, it is also

necessary to concede that humans are all too capable of being influenced by their current environment and hereditary background, over which they could exercise their own personal control, but they can refuse. The question of conscience and guilt as mentioned earlier tends to indicate there had been a freedom of choice which was later realised to have led to a wrong decision.

Men like Himmler, Beria and the myriad of dangerous predecessors and successors could be regarded as accidents of their circumstances or hereditary inclinations, by the view of those who deny free will. However, common human experience, which includes conscience, finds this difficult to accept because there are times when we all know that we “weigh-up the options” and feel what is morally right and wrong. In 1945 the notorious Himmler did his best to escape moral judgement by trying to project another side of his nature to the Swedish Count Bernadotte. He claimed the concentration camps were some form of reformatory exercise, the killings were mere propaganda, and some of his subordinates were out of control. He recognised as power slipped from his grasp the enormity of his crimes. It may have been more self-preservation than conscience, but he knew his prodigious efforts in annihilating the innocent was immoral in the eyes of the world outside his evil confines; he *knew* it was unjustifiable and evil. The clever and deceitful Göbbels understood there was no hope of avoiding moral judgement and killed himself, and Göring mendaciously denied any knowledge of the camps and turned his eyes away from the film-screens at the Nuremberg Trials, and removed his ear-phones when witnesses gave their horrendous evidence. Stalin denied any knowledge of the Katyn massacres because he realised that the massacre had been an immoral deed even by his bizarre standards.

Since the last global war such evil acts have re-occurred and have been denied or glossed over by the perpetrators concerning massacres such as No Gun Ri in Korea, Thanh Phong in Vietnam, to current times in Burma. These are the actions of people operating under the knowledge they could have done otherwise. When free will is exercised some actions create not just immoral deeds, but wickedness of major proportions; evil can be created by man with no need for explanation by an external force on which to blame his actions and the outcome.

When these evil acts occur the very act of later denial or amnesia is a sure indicator that the perpetrators have realised at the time, or not long after, that immoral actions resulting in evil have been perpetrated. While it is true that most human beings can be predictable based on formed character and past choices, we are all aware that evil potentially exists because of our freedom of choice. Conscience and subsequent guilt are clear signs that humanity is knowledgeable of its existence, and in matters of moral conduct

humans know they have that element of free will to have acted otherwise. The argument for free will is persuasive, and in making choices humans can create evil or do good.

Solzhenitsyn an Orthodox Christian and Communist struggled with the problem of evil which he had experienced during his life, especially as a camp inmate watching fellow prisoners suffer from the cruelty of others as dictated by political powers. He concluded that the source of evil was to be found in man: “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts, this line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years, and even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of hearts, there remains...an uprooted small corner of evil. Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: they struggle with the evil inside a human being (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.”⁵¹⁴ This was not an observation from a safe warm study, but an insight from a justifiably angry man confused by the wickedness he had experienced, and he placed the nature of evil at the feet of people in their decision making.

Free will and freedom of choice although of paramount importance can be restricted by other factors such as automatic reactions, and an overbearing environment operational at the time of decision making. A person may, as it were, react without thinking, without considering the ramifications, be propelled into action by a myriad of other factors.

When freedom of choice is repressed in a person’s mind, it is often after the event that conscience plays its role, when it is realised there was an alternative decision which was ignored. This is a common experience for any person when reflecting on past deeds. When the deeds of the past are so appallingly immoral, so they can be described as evil, the old cliché that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive becomes unsavoury for most people. When a person massacres people and babies, judgment always revolves around freedom of choice which is why the Nuremberg Trial defence of “obeying orders” was rejected, and the importance of individual choice was judged. Nevertheless, the factors which some argue may affect freedom of choice must be explored in understanding man’s behaviour.

CHAPTER TWO

PSYCHOLOGY

During the Nuremberg Trials the psychiatrist Goldensohn “shared the belief of the times in the ‘pathology’ of the leading Nazis...and was especially interested in trying to account for their ‘depravities.’”⁵¹⁵ The postwar analysis of the mass extermination programmes, the massacres and the outright brutality were too devastating for the public to comprehend, there simply had to be some explanation which could be understood. It was felt that because some individuals proved to be so evil such behaviour had to have an explanation which stretched beyond free will and normal behaviour. In an interview with an Otto Ohlendorf, not a major war criminal but involved in massacres (for which he was later executed), Goldensohn asked this seemingly “intellectual man” directly if he were “some kind of sadist, pervert or lunatic?”⁵¹⁶ For this psychiatrist there had to be some explanation for such immoral conduct, because it seemed unbelievable that a person could willingly chose such a route of repulsive conduct out of personal choice. These appalling deeds astonished the wider world and Telford Taylor wrote: “I remember the stunned silence of the audience that followed the SS Officer Otto Ohlendorf’s cold, impassive statement that, in southern Russia, his troops had rounded up and killed some 90,000 Jews.”⁵¹⁷ Such was the barbarity some form of explanation was needed.

This need for an explanation arose a few years later during the Eichmann trial. Primo Levi’s reference to the “banality of evil” was reflected by a reporter called Hannah Arendt commenting on the Adolf Eichmann trial. She pointed out that Eichmann regarded himself as an ordinary law-abiding citizen who only carried out his duties and “obeyed orders.” In a later article Hannah Arendt wrote: “For these crimes, and the extent to which any one of the many criminals was close to or remote from the actual killer of the victim means nothing, as far as the measure of his responsibility is concerned.”⁵¹⁸ Several conclusions may be drawn from this comment, not least that any individual in an evil setting is potentially able to do evil things. The question Arendt posed was whether Eichmann was simply a bad apple, or was the entire apple-barrel bad? If an apple-barrel is bad it would explain why the apples were rotten.

This is a question which many consider impossible to answer with total satisfaction. Christopher Browning made a study of why ordinary people can suddenly become totally immoral. He explored the German Police Battalion 101, which carried out brutal murders of Jews in Poland during the Second World War.⁵¹⁹ These men came mainly from Hamburg and non-military backgrounds, the German equivalent of the ubiquitous American John Doe and the “Englishman on the Clapham omnibus;” they were just ordinary people who committed massacre after massacre. It begs the unsettling question of how we would have reacted at the time such was their “ordinariness.” Browning and other historians have clarified that if German soldiers or policemen refused to participate that they were not shot but were in fact treated quite leniently, yet the overwhelming majority still participated in these blood-baths. It makes the reader wonder whether they had any reasoning powers left or were so shallow they just followed the herd which raises our own possible reaction had we lived under their circumstances. Browning argued that war created its own high-tension and provided a medium for such barbarity. For Browning the behaviour was explained by the environment of total war changing ordinary men into killers. A clash between the historians Goldhagen and Browning is of some interest. Goldhagen in his book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* treated the perpetrators as “responsible agents who make choices” whereas Browning based his reasons more on psycho-sociological theories—based upon “the assumption of inclinations and propensities common to human nature but not excluding cultural influences.”⁵²⁰ This insoluble problem in explaining what makes an ordinary man into a mass-killer will never be easy to explain; namely why John Doe simply obeyed orders to murder.

The psychologist Stanley Milgram in his well-known experiments with electric shocks tried to demonstrate that ordinary people could inflict powerful electric charges on others, simply because an authoritative figure in charge of the experiment informed them it was correct to follow orders.⁵²¹ These individuals were seemingly turned into the puppets of their controllers. This was the spectre of the Nuremberg trials with the old argument of “obeying orders,” and Milgram tested how far an individual would go; would he inflict pain simply because he was ordered? This would appear to indicate that if a person is trained or by nature inclined to follow orders, personal freedom of choice is diminished, and personal responsibility is reduced.

Milgram attempted to demonstrate from this experiment that ordinary people tended to follow orders if they recognised the authority as legally legitimate.⁵²² However, it is noteworthy that in these experiments the person issuing the orders was dressed in laboratory gear suggesting a uniform, but

when an ordinarily dressed civilian took over the role of supervisor the obedience level dropped by a significant twenty per cent.* It raised the question as to whether human beings are trained to see a uniform as authoritative which must be obeyed. All the participants in this experiment were male, and critics have raised the question as to what type of person volunteered. Moreover, after the experiment some shrugged the consequences off “as obeying orders,” but others suffered the psychological and spiritual/mental problems of guilt.

History has revealed many examples where men have refused to obey commands on the grounds of their own personal moral responsibility, but it would be an impossible task to resolve the percentage of mankind which would be prepared to disobey orders based on personal conscience and freedom of choice. If Milgram raised a difficult question which is still not resolved, he nevertheless demonstrated the human predicament of having a strong tendency to obey commands from a given authority. This does not make such actions morally right, does not necessarily provide an answer to all human actions, but it does demonstrate the pitfalls which beset human beings in their conduct. Whether it makes a person’s behaviour understandable or morally correct is another matter, which stretches beyond the role of psychology and provides no viable solution.

In another experiment the psychologist Philip Zimbardo gave students role-plays as prisoners and guards.⁵²³ It took a short time for the guards to become openly sadistic. This research was known as the American Stanford Prison experiment and happened in 1971; it was intended to last a fortnight but was terminated after six days, and its ethical foundation has often been questioned because of the procedural methods. The student prison guards readily, perhaps too readily conformed to the social roles they had been given which led to serious brutalisation, an attitude known as de-individuation as the perceived norms of the group were accepted by one another. Less than twenty percent came through the experiment as “good guards.” This aspect is a common feature of human conduct; it was observable when ordinary citizens became brutalised prison guards in the Nazi concentration camps and in the Soviet Gulag. At a more normal level people have witnessed a colleague promoted to management and watched open-mouthed as their old friend adopts the norms and behavioural patterns of those in authority. It seems to suggest a human propensity to adapt to a new environment regardless of morality, but again it is not a universal

* Solzhenitsyn cynically and understandably referred to the secret police officials as: “this branch of the service requires only that they carry out orders exactly and be impervious to suffering—and that is what they do and what they are.” Solzhenitsyn Aleksandr, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-56* (London: The Harvill Press, 1985) p.67

formula and does not explain why some people can suddenly become so totally immoral.

Later, and most significantly in the above experiment, many of the guards announced after the experience that they were surprised at their own behaviour. This sense of “guilt” indicated that within the human mind there is a sense of morality (as indicated by theological and philosophical thinkers) which for many can be life-changing. Both Milgram and Zimbardo tried to demonstrate that there are a variety of mental processes which contribute to group and individual evil, but they left many questions unanswered. Other questions have been raised concerning the research mentioned above, some critics pointing out that more emphasis on the role of the individual as an individual should have been noted. What sort of people volunteered for such an experiment, were they by their very act of volunteering indicating some elements already in their personal make-ups? A similar question was raised over the electric shock because not everyone applied the shock, some simply refused indicating there is no regular law of behaviour because some retained their freedom of choice. Both these experiments only indicated that under some circumstances the personal reactions of some people can be predictable. These psychological experiments explored human reaction and conduct, but they provided no substantive answer to the cause of an immorality in humanity which is so base it can only be described as evil it was just a certain type of individual’s immediate reactions under certain circumstances. It should be noted that the debate on the efficacy of both Milgram and Zimbardo’s experiments continues to vacillate amongst students of this subject, some debating the value of the findings, others the conduct, but it was nevertheless interesting research at the time.

In 2002 Paulus and Williams wrote a paper on *The Dark Triad of Personality; Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy*.⁵²⁴ They looked at impulsivity, aggression, sexual deviancy, cheating, revenge, and the question of sadism. They asked the same questions which are raised later as to whether people are born evil, and they looked at the study of identical and non-identical twins which to them suggested a possible genetic component for narcissism and psychopathy. Human experience tends to indicate that whatever make-up with which we are endowed this cannot entirely remove our personal responsibility; the importance of the individual is paramount, and while psychology frequently attempts to explain human reactions in given situations, it fails to explain the phenomenon of evil in man with its wider connotations.

Psychopathy

Related to psychological research into the nature of man's behaviour is the study of psychopathy which is a complex area of study, and of considerable interest to many academic disciplines. In 1991 the Reed Committee recognised the lack of medical agreement about the diagnosis and treatability of psychopathic disorder.⁵²⁵ Nevertheless there are ongoing studies from the biological approach looking at faulty biological mechanisms which can be caused by genetic inheritance, biochemistry and neuroanatomy and even viral infection. There is also the major behavioural approach as to whether psychopathy results from nature or nurture and this continues to be under intense study.

From the medical investigations it is impossible to make the claim that any of the infamous individuals of history were clinically psychopathic, their brains and chemistry are not available for study. Their behaviour however indicates that if not total psychopaths they certainly had many of the attributed characteristics. Many experts agree that psychopaths "lack remorse and empathy and feel emotion only shallowly. In extreme cases, they might not care whether you live or die. These people are called psychopaths. Some of them are violent criminals, murderers. But by no means all."⁵²⁶

In England, definitions of psychopathy are more subjective than in North America, and "explicit diagnostic checklist criteria have not been developed."⁵²⁷ However, a criminal psychologist Professor Robert Hare claimed that psychopaths see the world in a different way as do colour-blind people, and he established a test of twenty criteria for psychopathic disorders. The features were as follows:

1) *Glibness and superficial charm*: 2) *Grandiose sense of self-worth*: 3) *Pathological lying*: 4) *Cunning/manipulative behaviour*: 5) *Lack of remorse*: 6) *Emotional shallowness*: 7) *Callousness and lack of empathy*: 8) *Unwillingness to accept responsibility for actions*: 9) *A tendency to boredom*: 10) *A parasitic lifestyle*: 11) *A lack of long-term realistic goals*: 12) *Impulsivity*: 13) *Irresponsibility*: 14) *Lack of behavioural control*: 15) *Behavioural problems in early life*: 16) *Juvenile delinquency*: 17) *Criminal versatility*: 18) *A history of conditional release*: 19) *Multiple Marriages*: 20) *Promiscuous behaviour*. According to Professor Hare a score of thirty on his test qualifies for a diagnosis of psychopathy.

Psychopaths are more common than most people think because such people are often "fun" to be around, and, more to the point a "lack of moral

scruples and indifference to other people's suffering could be beneficial if you want to get ahead in business."⁵²⁸ Some intelligent people in business and banking who succeed often make impulsive decisions despite the fact it means treading on other people to succeed. The defendants at Nuremberg were tested for intelligence ratings and with one exception (Rosenberg) they were found to have good to high IQs in the tests of the day, (Göbbels, by then dead, had a PhD) and these men were not inhibited by moral concerns and rode roughshod over opponents, and demonstrated many other of the psychopathic indicators.

"Many famous military commanders and politicians and famous figures from history have had some of these traits, even American Presidents and British Prime Ministers. Many of the Nazi leaders had many if not most of these psychopathic traits, and more to the point they possessed them as group. In their [Göring, Himmler, Göbbels] subservience to their master Hitler they gave up what independence of thought they may possibly have had, and united under his chilling leadership and formed a *psychopathic unit* if such a phenomenon exists."⁵²⁹ They had a choice they simply changed the moral verb "ought" to one of obeying their master and discarded the traditional moral norms.

Psychopathy is well-established as a disorder and its ramifications may possibly have some bearing on a man like Beria, but as with the general study of psychology it tries to understand human reactions in fortunately insignificant numbers, and it offers no explanation for the growth of evil. It is an exceptional condition which touches the lives of very few people, nevertheless, it could be argued that if it exists in despotic leaders its tentacles could be far-reaching. True psychopathic cases are rare, but some researchers maybe correct that it is mainly dependent on nurture rather than nature, but the main question persists as to what the cause of evil in humanity can possibly be.

Many understandably argue that even psychopaths understand what they are doing is regarded as wrong by society. They simply choose not to agree with the moral norms and do their own thing, but they are aware at a deep level that their actions are considered immoral. Otherwise, why would they conceal their actions and dissemble? The answer is evasive but infamous psychopaths have appeared as normal members of society before being revealed, having conformed to society's norms until the date of their exposure. At a simplistic level it appears they are exceptional and have no conscience.

CHAPTER THREE

JURISPRUDENCE

Sheer madness or automotive behaviour brought about by some psychological states and medical problems can be regarded in law as a defence against murder. In other words, personal moral behaviour can in some circumstances be regarded as beyond personal control. Serious mental disorder was recognised under the M’Naghten rule of the 1840s and remains a legal defence to this day. More recently Lord Devlin noted with reference to the insanity defence: “It is reason which makes a man responsible to the law, reason and reason alone. It is reason which gives him sovereignty over animate and inanimate things. It is what distinguishes him from animals, which emotional disorder does not; it is what makes him man; it is what makes him subject to the law. So it is fitting that nothing other than a defect of reason should give complete absolution.”⁵³⁰ Whether men like Beria and Himmler can be placed in this category is a curious thought, but most unlikely because they were not medically or mentally ill. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the Mental Health Act 1983 s.1(2) defined mental disorder as “mental illness, arrested or incomplete development of mind, psychopathic disorder” which in the case of mass murderers may hold a minor element of interest. It has however been “amply demonstrated that the relationship between mental abnormality and criminality is an uncertain one.”⁵³¹

This has led briefly into the area of Jurisprudence and begs the major question as to whether law and morality hold much in common, a theme often debated by jurisprudential scholars. A major textbook on criminal violence noted that the law makes a difference between crimes *mala in se* (bad in themselves) and *mala in prohibita* (regulatory offences) “which are criminalised only for pragmatic reasons.”⁵³² The recognition that an offence is bad in itself is dependent on the law of the land, and on those politicians/leaders who made the law to be followed in the courts. Some countries have laws prohibiting homosexuality while others allow civil unions, and some countries can have laws appertaining to political crimes and other countries have no such laws. The law is simply the applied rules of a society, and these can be good or totally immoral. A dysfunctional

regime does not need a law; there was no law in Germany allowing extermination camps, nor was there a law in Russia for the bestial behaviour in the Gulag camps, and more recently the Burmese authorities lied claiming their murderous onslaught on some Muslims was a response to an attack; in dictatorial states the law can be the mere whim of the ruler(s).

The philosopher Kant underlined the status of law when he noted that “laws prescribe external conduct whereas morals prescribe internal conduct, that is, morals alone are concerned with subjective factors, such as motive.”⁵³³ It has, nevertheless, been cogently argued that an inner sense of morality has helped the law develop. In England a starving man could be hanged for stealing a sheep, but later a jury refused to convict a self-evident thief to avoid him suffering the unjust death penalty; the pattern of modern law is frequently but not always based on moral insight. Until 1807, Britain allowed its ships to trade in enslaved people and now it is illegal to refer to people in abusive terms based on their ethnic origin. This still does not make the laws of the country necessarily moral, but laws can be regarded as developing towards a society’s sense of morality, but the law of a country reflects a society and offers no explanation for personal or even national immorality.

As an example of this conundrum whether a law is moral or immoral is almost beside the point: “indeed there is no absurdity in conceding that an unjust law forbidding the access of coloured persons to the parks has been ‘justly’ administered, in that only coloured persons genuinely guilty of breaking the law were punished under it and then only after a fair trial.”⁵³⁴ It is possible for a major national law to later be regarded as totally corrupt, but the law can be regarded as correct if properly administered; the law, *per se*, is only a servant of the state, moral or immoral. On these grounds the racial laws of the Nazis, as repugnant as they were, could be considered as justly administered according to the law of the country at that time. A law may be considered “unjust” or even immoral; the Russian Tsarist tradition of applying corporal punishment to peasants, but excluding the upper classes from this punishment, may be regarded as unjust on the grounds that *prima facie* human beings should be treated alike, and social privilege should create no exception to this fundamental belief. That all people should be treated the same is a claim of most accepted moralities. However, the morality of any given society may differ greatly. In times past the morality of one society might expect a wife to throw herself on her deceased husband’s funeral pyre; in another country morality might dictate that suicide is wrong. Times and cultures change, but this example raises many questions to this day, but it does not explain the nature of evil and the immorality of man.

When David Hume the Scottish philosopher wrote that “human nature cannot by any means subsist without the association of individuals; and that association never could have a place were no regard paid to the laws of equity and justice,” he outlined the proposal that both law and morals should have similar characteristics.⁵³⁵ The relationship between law and morals is curious, but provides no answer to the nature of extensive immorality.

Different countries at various times in history have enforced their national laws, but while humankind may understand some laws to be unfair, or unreasonable or simply morally wrong, there is generally an expectation that a fair and just law ought to have some form of moral background. Many have been incarcerated in concentration camps or Gulag camps, or they have been executed for standing firm by their moral standards, for looking beyond the stated law for appropriate moral justification. The writer Paul Shrimpton studied a group of young students who objected about the Nazi regime while urging others to join them in non-violent protests to oppose Nazi laws.⁵³⁶ They had been influenced by Christian thinkers ranging from St Augustine to John Newman. They were young people who demonstrated incredible bravery when they became martyrs. They had recognised that the law was fundamentally immoral and were brave enough to say so in a tyrannical society. There is no empirical evidence for knowing how many people put their moral views before national laws, but they are often referred to at the time or more usually posthumously, as people of principle.

The legal systems provide a social control apparatus while providing no answers for any form of explanation as to the nature of evil. The law only reflects any society at a given time, and as a system cannot explain why men behave the way they do whether in acts of goodness or gross immorality. A corrupt or evil society will produce corrupt and evil laws which hypothetically it could administer justly. Nevertheless, a law justly applied, albeit a bad law, would have to consider the use of a person’s free will. A person should not be condemned for being forced by coercion into an act that person normally would not have done, except in a totally corrupt state. A bank manager giving the safe keys to robbers because his wife and children were threatened with death, would be regarded as being coerced and not guilty of cooperating in a robbery. In the world of international law, the nature of free will is also assumed.

International Law

In one of the more passionate openings at the Nuremberg Trials the Chief American Prosecutor Robert Jackson stated that the four victorious nations, by “staying the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submitting the

captive enemies to the judgement of law was one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason.” He saw the trial not only as bringing groups and individuals to account for their evil behaviour, but as a better way of controlling strong human impulses of aggression and revenge. Here the law was elevated to that of judge and controller of moral behaviour. The trials also indicated that people recognised recent behaviour as *per se* evil.

Man has long recognised that war can bring out immoral behaviour of immense proportions. In Roman times when a war was over it was matter of *vae victis*—woe to the conquered. In the 17th century Hugo Grotius, who wrote during the savage Thirty Years War, tried to collect the various laws and customs of war. It was not until 1864 that a series of Geneva Conventions tried to ensure war had its own rules to eliminate unnecessary barbarity. There was a growing recognition that war was the principal area in which man’s behaviour degenerated to a state of evil. The First World War started to bring legal thinking to a more defined area; the victors believed the leaders who had started the conflict which unleashed such evil should be treated as committing criminal acts. The second strand of intended prosecution involved war crimes by the military against the other side, especially the civilian population. War was beginning to be understood as a criminal and highly immoral act. The importance of the individual both in creating war and their behaviour during the war was becoming identified as a moral question, with which a thinking human being with freedom of choice and action could be identified. Most people accepted that the control of an agreed courtroom was better than the lynching mentality which Stalin had once proposed to an angry Churchill, and better than the show trials of Stalin, or Hitler’s courts over those who tried to eliminate him in the well-known July 20th Plot.

There was a general disgust at many reported events from the beginning of the Second World War. As early as October 1941 “while the United States was still neutral, President Roosevelt drew attention to the wholesale execution by the Germans of hostages in France and he warned that ‘one day a frightful retribution would be exacted.’”⁵³⁷ This outrage felt by so many against the organisers and the perpetrators of immoral acts could only be justified by the implicit belief that they were not robots, but individuals who from their own volition had acted in an immoral way. It was at Nuremberg “for the first time, individuals were to be held responsible for decisions, such as declaring war, that had hitherto been regarded as acts of the State itself,” and also against individuals for criminal acts for which they were held “personally” responsible.⁵³⁸ There could be no defence or excuse based on the grounds of the duty to obey orders, or the general barbarity of

the automated responses in the battlefield situation, or adherence to an ideology. These would be raised and dismissed because the individual was deemed personally responsible.

Churchill and Eden, and even the Archbishop of York considered the behaviour of leading individuals in the Nazi regime so appalling they were prepared to execute them on the spot which was against English law. This policy reverted to the time of Edward III when outlaws (as Churchill called the Nazis) could be caught and executed locally. Eden claimed that “the guilt of such individuals is so black that they fall outside and go beyond the scope of any judicial process.”⁵³⁹ Their proposed policy was wrong, but there was no question in their minds of the question of individual guilt which implied freedom of choice. The Soviets and Americans argued for a trial procedure, along with the Soviet demand (ironically) of wanting the captured individual charged with waging war “with premeditated brutality,” which implied it had been thought about beforehand, thereby involving choice.⁵⁴⁰ As far as the rest of the world was concerned it was a matter of individual responsibility; Howard Brundage one of the interrogators stated that “I find that most of these people are very evasive and they are trying to dodge *their* responsibility.”⁵⁴¹

The elevation of law to an international status gave it the appearance of a moral guardianship. Nevertheless, the Nuremberg Trials still retained all the characteristics of human failing. Stalin’s Katyn massacres were widely known but ignored, as was Russia’s participation in the invasion of Poland and Finland. The Anglo-American strategic bombing was not raised, and the U-boat warfare was condemned when Western naval policies were similar. In Vichy France the Jews had been deported from the unoccupied areas, and both Laval and Darland had actively sought some form of partnership with fascist Germany.

There were also many individual Allied Commanders and soldiers who went beyond the battlefield’s self-brutalising reactions and committed serious crimes, as Michael Burleigh’s book on *Moral Combat* outlined.* When Dubost a French prosecutor at Nuremberg noted that the Nazi State “forgot that all men are born free and equal before the law, that the essential action of a state has for its purpose the deeper and deeper penetration of a respect for spiritual liberty and fraternal solidarity in social relations...it allowed itself to be robbed of its conscience and its very soul,” this fundamental law of human decency only indicted the Germans.⁵⁴²

* For a classic example involving a senior American general and a sergeant see Burleigh Michael, *Moral Combat* (London: Harper Press, 2010) pp.380-1, which is raised in Part Four.

However, perhaps the most important lesson from the Nuremberg Trial was the belief that in the case of the individuals, as well as groups of individuals who stood as defendants, they had exercised their free will. They had selected a course of action when they could have done chosen differently; if otherwise the trial would have lost its veracity and efficacy. At an international level, freedom of choice was acknowledged, and as always, the pertinent point was the matter of free will. As the American prosecutor Telford Taylor wrote: "These outrages were not the work of faceless or anonymous men or agencies," and he could have added they were the work of men who freely chose to opt for this course of action.⁵⁴³

CHAPTER FOUR

BIO-CHEMISTRY/GENES

The nature of immorality is considered by a dedicated few as a mere question of bio-chemistry and the component we call genes. It is generally accepted that when some drugs are taken people's personalities change, especially when they have consumed so-called recreation drugs, or even some medical drugs to counter depression or to calm hyperactivity. It is similar when a person consumes a large amount of alcohol which can change a person's normal reactions because their "chemistry" has been temporarily altered. The question could be asked as to whether some people at birth are lacking the normal bio-chemical make-up in their bodies; if this could be proven it has been occasionally suggested that some people may be born with the potential for anti-social or even immoral actions. Such a concept certainly removes any reason for moral dimensions and would eliminate the need for legal judgment. If at some future date a medical test could be discovered that would indicate that an individual's make-up revealed them as a potential killer, the whole question of legal judgment and proceedings would need to change; it would raise the major question of the right or wrong of detaining a person before they committed the anticipated deed. There have been occasions when this has been seriously discussed when certain people are suspected of having a potential for crime they have not yet committed; it becomes a prophylactic court of law and medicine. It reduces the nature of man to a bio-chemical robot.

As a very minor example of this way of thinking it has been projected that a peptide hormone and neuropeptide called Oxytocin plays a role in social bonding with further important ramifications.* Oxytocin was discovered in 1906 by a Henry Dale and its molecular structure was established in 1952. It is used as a form of medication to help at childbirth. It has been suggested that it affects generosity and induces empathy and can be increased in healthy men after intranasal oxytocin. The same exercise

* This writer is not a bio-chemist, but this sub-chapter is based on discussion and notes with a Dr Allan Lloyd a medical research scientist, and a Dr Sam Ellis a research student.

according to some researchers indicates that humans are prepared to share more emotional details in their accounts of an incident, and a greater trust of others is engendered. Oxytocin may be responsible for romantic attraction, and it has been suggested that it helps fidelity within a monogamous relationship, and it has therefore been referred to as the bonding hormone.

The relevant point is that oxytocin may be important for the brain regions associated with behavioural control related to fear and anxiety. Research has shown that oxytocin is able to decrease anxiety and lower stress. If a person has no oxytocin their personality may be very different from a person who has the normal amount, and especially different from those with much more or who have been given an extra dose. It could therefore be argued in a court of law that the defendant could not be guilty because he or she was deficient in their chemical make-up. This is not just putting up a straw target, but it has been seriously suggested we are entirely subject to our bio-chemical constitution.

Medical science can already diagnose some inherent future illnesses in a person, and this is bound to advance in the years ahead. It may just be conceivable that the day will come when some basic bio-chemical fault may explain some deviant behaviour. It could be that such behaviour as paedophilia and psychopathy could be the result of breakdowns in molecular mechanisms (alcohol for example) and neural mechanisms (frontotemporal dementia). There has been considerable interest in comparing identical and non-identical twins as most books on criminology note, looking for genetic components which may reveal reasons for their conduct. The search is for that component in a twins' makeup which makes them behave in a certain way though they had perhaps been separated at birth, and therefore had a different upbringing and environment.

A good deal of research is being carried out at the genetic level especially in identifying psychopathic genes. However, most serious researchers justifiably remain cautious of using biochemical or genetic data in terms of moral validity or genetic data to diagnose deviance or explain guilt. Medical science is progressing rapidly, but whether it can discover what makes a person behave immorally is doubtful. Final answers as to whether a person's personality is a matter of bio-chemistry will probably remain evasive for a long time to come, and it is extremely unlikely to provide reliable answers to man's overall behaviour except in a very few medical cases.

Most recently a Professor Robert Plomin of King's College, London, has published a book called *Blueprint: How DNA Makes us Who We Are*.⁵⁴⁴ Basically it means "that DNA can act as significant predictor, from birth, of a growing multiplicity of traits."⁵⁴⁵ These traits could involve depression

and schizophrenia and other psychological conditions. The author appears to believe these are more fundamental to a person's growth than environment. This has been believed by many for a long time, and even the Nazis in their efforts in the field of eugenics considered the possibility of eliminating the weaker areas of humanity or by sterilisation, not that Professor Plomin is suggesting this for one moment. His main claim is that heritability is highly significant, and the genes may, by the collection of huge data banks, indicate how a person may develop. As mentioned earlier the ability to predict future illnesses even later in life becomes a serious possibility which could be useful, but also could create nightmares concerning the future of one's analysed newly born baby.

This research to a non-scientist does not appear to support determinism, but more the ability to forecast probable or possible outcomes of a person's behaviour. However brilliant and advanced this type of study is the basic claim is that genes are important in our development from birth, but it does not make us a series of departmentalised or numbered-type robots. Even if our genes may predict a person's physical future, and may reveal some possible psychological traits, it cannot deny the human's choice of actions with the knowledge that most people know they have a choice, namely free will.

Given this scientist's reputation this author communicated with him about the issue and received the following email: *"So I hope it will help a bit if I just say that genes do not determine our choices, even though they influence our choices. Genetic influence on common disorders and complex traits is probabilistic, not deterministic. Genetics nudges us in certain directions, but we certainly have the choice to fight against our tendencies."*⁵⁴⁶

This welcome communication from a leading scientist made it clear that although this study has discovered yet more influences upon human reactions, he agrees that free will and the human consciousness does not eliminate that critical characteristic of humanity, namely that we can still from within our inner-selves make conscious decisions of our own choice.

Biology

This question of inbuilt or pre-wired behaviour has also attracted the interest of biologists, who see *"aggressiveness* as the propensity of an animal to attack another, of the same species or of a different species."⁵⁴⁷ Aggression is regarded as simply a natural tool deployed when under attack or for seeking new territory, and this propensity for aggression varies according to species and circumstances. "Each human individual is endowed by heredity with a certain amount of aggressiveness. We know

today that this amount can be increased or diminished by chemical substances.”⁵⁴⁸ Such chemical interference can temporarily make a man a lion or a lamb. In pack animals such as wolves there is a distinct tendency to differentiate between members of the pack; we see the same behaviour traits in humans starting at the school playground level. It revolves around the natural need for survival and is stronger in some than others. It has been claimed by the historian O’Brien that when there is a war it is “essentially one of self-determination by a Darwinian process of armed conflict.”⁵⁴⁹ The reference to Darwinism is sometimes used to explain why man behaves in such a way implying it is ingrained in his nature and through his evolution, though many of the better religious thinkers would disagree.

As with bio-chemistry the study of biology in terms of conduct causes some reflection on human responses, but it does not explain everything in terms of personal behaviour. If anything separates man from the animal, it is man’s free will, or his freedom of choice. An animal is controlled by its natural habitat and built-in instincts for survival; man is capable of breaking free from such restraints because he has a choice. An animal reacts instinctively as do humans especially under trying circumstances involving aggression, but the history of man is simply full of examples where individuals stop to think; they consider and weigh up their reactions in terms of future aims, or even from a sense of their morality. A person suffering from road rage exhibits the early hereditary aggressive instincts, but human beings have proved that they can recognise this inward instinct and control it, remaining passive in the face of another driver’s stupidity or error. The inner-self can reason that waving a fist out of the window and honking the horn is useless and may lead to a violent confrontation, leading to the conclusion it is better to desist and stay calm. This is freedom of choice activated by the inner-self using reason.

Bio-Chemistry and biological factors may play a small part in man’s reactive behaviour, but it remains minimal and very much in the early stages of investigation. This bio-chemical and biological research seems an unlikely area for understanding human behaviour except in a limited way, in a very few medical cases. Our inbred genetic make-up may nudge us in a certain direction, but man’s innate reasoning powers and reflective ability may resist by utilising man’s distinctive freedom of choice. These sciences give some indicators, but they provide no realistic answer to the nature of humanity’s immoral behaviour.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CAUSE OF EVIL

It can be accepted that some people's responses are determined by unthinking inbuilt reactions, but there are undeniably major moments of decision-making when free will has a choice; when a person knows they *ought* to have conducted themselves in a certain way, and they could have acted differently. Historically both Roman Catholics and much of Protestantism recognise degrees of sin, making a distinction between mortal and venial sin. The point of the distinction of sin is that some sins are monstrous, and venial sins less dangerous. Some argue that all sin is the same, but most thinking people reject this notion.

The major evils (defined as "major" because they harm many people) perpetrated in the history of men tend to revolve around the issues of power which results from the desire to dominate others, often a consequence of some perverse ideology or tyrant. As Solzhenitsyn noted, "unlimited power in the hands of limited people always leads to cruelty"⁵⁵⁰ It can be a form of atavistic tribalism which can come to light in violent nationalism and pure racism, and all too often leads to war and crimes against humanity. The need to dominate and expand empires at the expense of others has been a prominent feature of humanity's history; it was clearly apparent in the twentieth century and remains so today. It takes only a few individuals to seek power and create war which then establishes an evil of greater proportions than earthquakes. "Indeed, the readiness of governments, pseudo-governments or would-be governments to fulfil their ambitions by force appears greater rather than less as time passes;" this has always been a problem which persists to this day.⁵⁵¹

In referring to a postwar exhibition on Nazi war crimes one historian noted "that the exhibition made public what scholars had long known, that there was a direct crucial link between the war and the Holocaust;" humanity's desire to dominate and hold total power leads to evil of major proportions.⁵⁵² Such an appalling crime as the Holocaust cannot be explained away by causal circumstances as some determinists might argue, and as Franco suggested on hearing of the Nazi concentration camps, namely "these things happen in war."⁵⁵³ It was an odious evil of proportions

which almost defies the imagination and is often quoted as a “major evil.” Since the Holocaust the truth of the Stalin Gulag system gradually came to light and during the twentieth century there have been a series of genocidal actions which defy the imagination. These blatantly immoral acts originated with a few leaders who knowingly exercised their free will; it could be cogently argued that man’s free will is the cause of moral evil, for others it can only be explained by Satan whispering in their ears to ignore God; either way it is an exercise of freedom of choice which all thinking people have.

Edmund Burke famously said “the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” which has its own veracity, but sometimes evil men can convince potentially good men that evil acts are right. Even good men can convince themselves that evil acts are right which is argued by some was the case with carpet-bombing and the use of nuclear weapons. It only takes a few people wanting to grasp power to provoke a war with devastating consequences, which is why the Nuremberg process denounced *making war* a criminal act.

The question arises, given that we have free will in major decision making, how does a person become so downright immoral as to be considered evil? Most people accept that we are not born evil, and it is unlikely that men like Beria and Himmler were evil from the moment they opened their eyes. Beria, being human, knew he had freedom of choice, the pivotal question is why he made the choices he did. He made immoral choices in his sexual appetites, but in his pursuit of power he chose the overwhelming passion for importance and power at any cost.

Beria was an individual making immoral choices in his pursuit of power and allowing no compassion or empathy for other human beings. A politician in pursuit of personal power can damage others, and if in that pursuit of greater power, it results in war, then the possibility of evil takes on even greater proportions. Man’s immoral decisions can create evil at a personal level, and thereby possibly at national and global level.

It has been pertinently argued that perhaps the most compelling answer to the origin of evil in a person can be found in their surrounding environment which influences their exercise of free will. The state of a person’s mind is frequently deeply influenced by the emotional communication from others. Authoritative figures can produce behaviours in others which they later realise were inappropriate and even downright evil. This was demonstrated in Milgram’s experiments mentioned earlier, but more pertinently in post Second World War analysis of individuals who committed crimes against humanity.

In a published work this author explored the rise to power of Göbbels, Göring and Himmler under Hitler.⁵⁵⁴ All of these men were greedy for

power whatever the cost and obeyed their daemonic master in all matters. They all had psychopathic tendencies, were intelligent, demonstrated they had free will, and became the epitome of evil with few saving graces if any. Many politicians are greedy for power, but some arrive on their political throne without using immoral means.

In exploring the man Lavrenty Beria and others like him, it is therefore important to keep posing the question as to the influences and the stimuli which provoked them down the infamous routes they travelled. Criminologists find it plausible “to suggest that criminal and anti-social behaviour results from the interaction between an individual and the environment (which provides criminal opportunities).”⁵⁵⁵ They are normally concerned with common criminals to explain their behaviour, but the same research has some bearing on political criminals. The influence of the environment is critical and as several authors have pointed out, “environmental criminology is nearly as old as the study of crime itself,” and has some bearing on man’s exercise of his freedom of choice.⁵⁵⁶

It might appear on the surface to come down to the old debate of nature or nurture. Whether we are as it were by nature “pre-wired,” or as John Locke stated in 1690, that we are *tabula rasa* (blank slate) upon which we are nurtured by our environment. However, there remains the third major factor discussed above, namely that of a person’s free will.

It is as if humanity’s freedom is contained or hemmed in by three barriers as in a triangle; one barrier being our nature, even our genes, the other our nurture and environment, and the third our past-choices. The figure of a person within this triangle can be constrained by these barriers, but by exercising their free will they are able to expand their area of movement and increase their freedom. A person exercising their free will can turn back on past choices, challenge their own “inbred” nature, and decline to be influenced by environment. By the exercise of free will people can produce evil or goodness. There are also many examples of where people have rejected their nature and changed direction. This exercise in free will has meant that people with identical background natures have travelled in very different directions.

The third barrier of nurture/environment is regarded by some (but not all) as the most formidable, especially if the environment remains consistent. This term can be used to encapsulate an adherence to a prevailing ideology or allegiance to group or a person. People have been known to challenge their environment, but it has a powerful hold over people’s conduct. To be brought up in loving community is one thing, to be raised in society at conflict is another, but the choice of free will remains critical.

Evil is the product of choosing from selfish reasons the wrong route in the full knowledge that free will offers alternatives. There is no doubt that in major decision-making a person has freedom of choice, but the environment will often influence many people. A boy born in 1916 and raised in Germany, obliged to join the Hitler Youth, surrounded by anti-Semitic propaganda, indoctrinated in the belief that his country was wronged in 1918-19, and informed that his country is ethnically superior, created many dedicated SS members. In summary, although such a person had free will (which many exercised) he or she were raised in an environment which minimised that free will. Humanity has free will and can overrule many of the influences brought to bear on the exercise of that free will, but the most pervasive influence tends to be the socio-political environment which made up the background. Even though a person has an inbuilt tendency to know that certain actions and reactions are somehow wrong despite external pressures, people cannot discharge their sense of moral responsibility.

It was therefore critical to have a brief survey of the land and circumstances during that period in which Beria lived. It is important from two points of view. The first arises from the demands of history to understand Beria's context and how he rose to power from such humble beginnings; the second is an effort to try and comprehend if this historical background had any bearing on the way he conducted himself from the moral perspective. The history and background of national circumstances are sometimes more critical than is realised because they intrude onto the basic human asset of freedom of choice. Nevertheless, there remains that distinctive essence of humanity's unique and characteristic element of self-reflection of what is happening with freedom of choice. This is fundamental to humanity and separates man from robots and animals. A person has the choice of doing what is right, be it compassionate or justice based, or choosing a self-serving route which leads to evil consequences. The exercise of free will is therefore critical for humanity, but it can be restrained and even suppressed, and this needs its own exploration.

PART FOUR

REPRESSION OF FREE WILL

INTRODUCTION

Part Three argued that humanity has moral responsibility because there is freedom of choice in major decision making. Part Four will outline the influences and circumstances which often suppress or limit the action of free will. It will test the validity of the claim that there are times when people were “obliged” to act in an immoral way, with no apparent choice, in a manner they would have avoided under normal circumstances. Part Three argued for the validity of Free Will, this Part will explore those areas where Free Will is suppressed, but not necessarily eradicated.

This section starts by looking at the overall corruption of a country’s political system on the basis that the major influence in any society starts at the top. If the regime is led by a tyrant, then that tyrant’s unethical and corrupt attitude will unquestionably challenge or dictate the way people think and the decisions they make. If the tyrant uses brutal force, then persuasion becomes coercion. Hitler is often regarded as the epitome of evil, but the similarities between Hitler and Stalin will be explored to demonstrate these two men were both equally corrupt in terms of their brutal demands. However, this argument may be applied to any time or age when the political system is corrupt and tyrannical. It will then move on to illustrate that such men as Stalin and Hitler needed their intimate intelligent servants, their henchmen, who from their own choice supported tyrannical directions despite the criminality and the self-evident total immorality of their actions. The main point is that tyrants assisted by their henchmen dictate the way people can think and react. This minimises freedom of choice and free will and tries to turn people into obedient robots of the state and its current ideology.

The question then turns to the overall historic background and argues that although the influence of a historical setting is significant it does not *necessarily* deprive the individual from freedom of choice. Nevertheless, human experience has shown that there are occasions when freedom of choice is severely limited if not suppressed by what is happening in the historical background. The most self-evident example is the automatic response of the individual enmeshed in battlefield circumstances where survival instincts come to the fore, and a person’s automatic responses predominate. This is common sense but does not apply to Beria, who always remained safe from such exposure. It should be recalled that through Solzhenitsyn’s insights this “battlefield ethos” became a characteristic of

Soviet life in general, for which men such as Beria were responsible in depriving individuals of their freedom of choice.

Other elements which suppress individual judgment will be explored, and this includes the threat of personal reprisal known as putative duress, which can amount to sheer coercion. There are also the arguments of obeying orders, cowardice and breaking ranks, and the pervasive influence of an evil ideology. Beria was more the perpetrator of these situations than the subject.

Another reason suggested by some apologists for immoral behaviour is “careerism” which to all appearances has a less suppressive influence on man’s freedom of choice, but remains important as it explains not only Beria, but men like Himmler, Göbbels, and many other human beings at all levels in all times. Finally, whether Beria were simply a psychopath will be explored and a conclusion suggested about the man Lavrenty Beria.

CHAPTER ONE

A TYRANT'S CONTROL

"Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house"
—Ezekiel 12 v1

"Their leaders lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants"
—Mark 10 v42

Beria rose to near the top of government but fell at the last hurdle in 1953. Nevertheless, for fifteen years he was close to Stalin, at times his most trusted servant, and although he could sometimes influence Stalin as he wished, most of the time he pandered to a man who could have him killed by state law, or by accident. It is necessary therefore to make a brief study of the nature of this tyrant, one-time essential ally of the West, Uncle Joe, eventually realised as a dangerous tyrant. "The world of Beria and Stalin was, after all, a world where moral values and democratic humanism played no role, where the heroic mythology of Marxist-Leninism had given way to autocratic cynicism. The interests of humanity, as determined by their egocentric conceptions of life, were defined solely in terms of preserving their own political power."⁵⁵⁷ Both Stalin and Beria "were products and consummate practitioners of a dictatorial system. Each had cultivated patrons in high places—Lenin for Stalin; Stalin for Beria—and each had shown an audacity against rivals, evidence of a thirst for power and a profound sense of their own destiny."⁵⁵⁸ To be at the top of the food-chain, to stand on Mount Olympus can for many people become obsessive, and if fulfilled can be hazardous for other people. It is the self-belief of a person's perceived importance which creates the tyrant. Their rise to power and holding their authority in the political world can and does have immense ramifications. Because of the nature of Stalin's regime much remains unseen and unknown in Stalin's world of conspiracy and brute force. From the political standpoint the individual counted for nothing. It was an equality based on an absence rather than a presence of right, and Stalin devised a system which "compelled people to spy on and denounce one another, often without any idea where their denunciations might lead."⁵⁵⁹

There used to be an old Greek saying that “a fish rots from the head first” giving way to the modern parlance that *the rot starts at the top*. It may have been in the back of Shakespeare’s mind when he wrote “something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” In general terms, most people accept that in any organisation the dominant person’s influence permeates through all the levels of the structure, and it can be highly destructive or beneficial. Negative impact was true of the infamous tyrants who rose in the twentieth century: Mao Zedong killed more of his own countrymen than Hitler and Stalin; Mussolini brokered his way to power only to be despised and lynched by his own people; Franco survived and was still executing opponents from the Civil War during the 1940s. Hitler’s immoral corruption is probably the most written about and explored, but his one-time ally, then later his hated enemy Stalin is lesser known, but as with Hitler, Stalin was a tyrant of daemonic proportions. Stalin behaved like a Mafia boss and as with the other totalitarian tyrants of this period took power and held it by murder, repression, fear, while ignoring all the morals norms. These two dictators had much in common, the love of public adulation, self-importance, imperial domination beyond their borders, and a suspicious nature about possible criticism, and a vitriolic hatred of opposition. Both murdered their opponents, imprisoned their own people, and lived by terror. In some ways they were atavistic reflections of Genghis Khan but better equipped materially. These men were tyrants in many ways, and such was the terror by which they ruled most of their peoples found their lives in danger, their liberty curtailed, and their freedom of choice dictated.

Sudoplatov a senior man in the Stalin regime wrote in his memoirs that he was even concerned about his children and what they might say at school (during the Doctors’ Plot) because “they would definitely be noticed by the local party administration, which monitored every sphere of public life:” the school and his children were “under constant surveillance.”⁵⁶⁰ Living under the will of a tyrant was dangerous, but made more so when the expectation was that even children had to be careful what they thought and said, which defies belief. In both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia there were well-known incidents of children betraying their parents. The propaganda which tried to instil the government attitude towards the way people thought was often effective. In the aftermath of the Doctors’ Plot the medical profession suffered a great deal of distrust because of an entirely false plot initiated by the tyrant Stalin.

Mussolini and Franco the other two major dictators were bad enough but Stalin and Hitler, who ruled over major populations stand out as the most oppressive in “thought word and deed.” Hitler has been the most studied,

but a brief comparison of Hitler and Stalin reveals they had much more in common than many realise in their hold over peoples' minds.

A Two-edged Sword

Although Hitler was a Fascist and Stalin a Communist their states were similar because they were both dictators, but a great deal more is known about Hitler and his regime, and less is known by the public about the motives for the murderous campaigns in Stalin's Soviet empire. As early as 1937 Churchill dining at the Chamber of Commerce in Leeds had said "these are those non-God religions, Nazism and Communism. We are urged from the Continent and from different quarters that we must choose which side we are on. I repudiate both...they are like two peas."⁵⁶¹ By 1941 a time was reached when "Allied soldiers could be formally arrested for saying that Hitler and Stalin 'are equally evil.'"⁵⁶²

As noted in Chapter Six of Part One, there were substantial differences between Hitler and Stalin but not when it came to the suffering they caused. It took a major war and decades before the truth of Churchill's insight was revealed; Uncle Joe was no better than Hitler. There were differences is so far that most of the Nazi crimes involved atrocities in other nations, but most of Stalin's victims came from within his own polyglot Soviet Union. Telford Taylor, an American prosecutor at Nuremberg wrote that "Nazism was a proudly avowed repudiation of the libertarian, humanitarian, and international ideals to which most national governments gave at least lip service."⁵⁶³ He, like the rest of the world at the time, had no idea that the Stalin regime was in its own way just as iniquitous. Although anti-Semitism was common to both countries, the Nazi policy of extermination on a European scale acted as a collective scar on the Western conscience because there had been historically (and currently) elements of anti-Semitism across Europe. Stalin's treatment of Chechens, Kazakhs and Koreans meant little to the Western mind or interest.

In their own domains both Stalin and Hitler were idolised and became almost personality cults, which was somewhat alien to western democracies and was certainly not Marxist in origin. Their desire for adulation knew no bounds, and their images were omnipresent and supported by hysterical adoration. Both men promised a better future for their countries, but those who opposed them were executed or sent to the work prisons, whether the concentration or the Gulag camps. Over the concentration camp gate stood the infamous message that "*Work Makes you Free*" and over most of the Gulag camps portrayed the notice that "*Labour is a matter of honour*,

courage and heroism.” For victims of both regimes these notices indicated that their future was not the promised heaven, but hell on earth.

Stalin and Hitler both controlled one-party states “with membership being a ticket to privilege and preferment that had no analogue in democratic countries.”⁵⁶⁴ Both in Communist Russia and Nazi Germany there was widespread corruption where the personal whim of the leader and his cohorts defied any laws not yet adjusted to their situation; as Göbbels once said the law is what the Führer wants. It all boiled down to pure self-interest. Bismarck and Marx would have turned in their graves.

They were similar on moral grounds since they both claimed to have established a new public virtue and abandoned traditional norms, and both in their various ways attacked the Churches. They looked to their interpretation of natural law as a way of turning people away from Christian love and the civil ideal of mutual support, to one of suspicion and hate. Hitler looked to providence to protect him as if the universal power stood over him with a protective shield, whereas Stalin looked to The Party for his moral justification. Stalin could tell the Party what was required, and Hitler could use providence as and when required. They both rejected any form of humanitarianism as a weakness, and they were quick to eliminate any other form of moral authority except their own. They both encouraged youth groups with the Hitler Youth and the Komsomol to fashion the future, fiddled with education, and made heroes out of mislead and obsessed youngsters.

Stalin and Hitler like many other political tyrants were obsessed with grasping total power and holding it despite the consequences. The deaths of their own people let alone the destruction of other nations was for them totally irrelevant. They ruled by sheer terror and intimidation once ensconced on their thrones, and they had no conscience about the suffering of the innocent; they alone could be right, and they had to be obeyed. They were both responsible for the deaths of millions of people and a devastating oppression wherever their power extended. Hitler is often quoted as the most hated man in history because he was regarded as the epitome of pure evil, and many people recognise Stalin was of the same mould. As stated earlier they not only oppressed those they ruled, but they dictated how they should think and respond. The free will of the individual was dictated by the will of the tyrant.

CHAPTER TWO

POWER OF THE HENCHMEN

Both the USSR and Germany had become dependent on a system of personalised networks that made their political institutions mere instruments of powerful figures, rather than offices governed by set-rules and norms. These leaders needed selected individuals to perform their policies, namely their henchmen. They were the desk-top killers. Once in power these cohorts listened to the leader and gave the orders to their own selected underlings, who in turn ensured their orders and barbaric policies were initiated. Hitler and Stalin deployed selected cohorts who were close to them to carry out their orders. Hitler used Göbbels, Göring but above all Himmler; Stalin had his men who rose and fell, but from 1938 until the late 1940s his closest intimate was Beria. Stalin's henchmen were prepared to commit any crime to retain power, but "the most dangerous of them was Beria."⁵⁶⁵

No dictator's power is constantly secure which demanded that these servants were totally loyal, and Stalin cunningly selected compliant bureaucrats who had no imagination beyond their own power and personal safety. They also had the ability to understand what Stalin needed. Beria was exceptional in his perceptions of Stalin because he understood better than most Stalin's peculiar psychopathology. They were fellow Georgians coming from the same cultural and social world, and Beria recognised Stalin's paranoias, especially his being out of touch with normal human emotions, and with their background they held much in common.

Beria was chosen by Stalin, but his biography clearly indicated he actively sought his selection, pandering to Stalin at every opportunity. He carried out Stalin's wishes to the letter and often beyond, he manipulated his rivals because thereby he would be noticed by the great leader. He began this pursuit of asserting his potential in the early days when he flattered Stalin on his protracted holidays by the Black Sea. Beria was undoubtedly a clever and intelligent man who had understood that the way to power was simply to "hitch his wagon" to the man at the top. To carry out his own quest for power Beria had as a young man become immersed in the blood of his victims and did his utmost to be regarded by Stalin as a true follower of the leader. This feature of attaching oneself to "the leader" is a common human

trait which can be easily identified among politicians even in today's liberal democracies. The choice revolves around the desire to become powerful in the eyes of other men and the leader. It was a feature of Roman history and persists to this day, even when it means abandoning personal principles.

To achieve this a person like Beria had to be far-thinking, living for a perceived future and knowing precisely how to react. Beria had recognised that Stalin was ruthless, and he deliberately moulded himself along the same lines. He was no subservient jailer or executioner following orders, he was too intelligent and clever to be a base servant activated by fear, his horizons were wider. Beria was a man of calculation who actively chose his path in life, cunningly selected his way forward, and decided to obey Stalin, a man most people were terrified of because of his propensity to kill and repress. A recent Russian biographer, described as the master of the Russian archives, wrote that Beria was one among many "who implemented Stalin's orders and did not play a notably independent role in carrying out the mass repression."⁵⁶⁶ However, the same author emphasises Beria's role of using memos and alerting Stalin to his discovery of so-called *Volksdeutsche* (German-roots) in the Ukraine, encouraging Stalin to send them to the special camps for labour, and he made a personal effort in going to oversee the relocation of Chechens and the Ingush.⁵⁶⁷ Beria continuously and actively played on Stalin's fear by supporting his paranoid suspicions of others, even against Stalin's own family, almost becoming Stalin's *alter ego*, speaking to him in Georgian to the annoyance of others, and even reaching a position of familiarity when he addressed Stalin as *Koba*.⁵⁶⁸ Beria's main tool was his deployment of a calculated sycophancy which encouraged Stalin's various neuroses. It was also clear that Beria shared some of Stalin's psychopathological tendencies, but he recognised this in his cunning manipulations and his discerning observations of the leader. There is little doubt that Beria was immoral, sadistic, cruel, but he was intelligent, capable of considered thought, which made him adept at the necessary Machiavellian intrigues in his passion for power.

Beria was a thinking person who deliberately manipulated his way into Stalin's favour; he had no other motive than making himself important and this behaviour was his choice. When he reacted to Stalin's wishes it may occasionally have been out of fear for clashing with him, but as he had already demonstrated in his youth he was clever enough to fade away and not be found.* He deliberately chose the dangerous path to power even if it

* Even in his end days it was believed his son Sergo was trained as a pilot as a means of a family escape.

meant breaking the accepted moral norms and doing what was required without question and with no human compassion.

CHAPTER THREE

INFLUENCE OF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the moment Beria was born, his country of birth was in turmoil as had frequently been the situation in that geographical area. Ethnically he was Mingrelian and surrounded by other ethnic groups and Georgia, as noted, was the political and military cockpit for that part of Europe, between the east and western cultures and the borders to the south. While Beria had been a teenager there had been hopes of renewed Georgian independence until Lenin's policy was superseded by that of Stalin's dogma. From 1917 to 1945 the polyglot Soviet Union was in a state of turmoil which ranged from the initial revolution, through the civil wars, starvation, repression, the purges, and the Second World War, after which the oppression continued deep into the Cold War. During this same period there were difficult times in the Western democracies with poverty, a degree of social injustice, and world wars, but there was simply no comparison to the lives of the ordinary Soviet citizens. It could be argued that a man like Beria was simply a by-product of his background, but even by Soviet standards Beria stood out as a feared and hated man because of his behaviour; his closest cohorts treated him with care and deep suspicion. However, everyone was terrified of Stalin even to his dying moments, his closest cohorts uncertain whether the tyrant was about to inaugurate another purge, but they were equally nervous of Beria once described as the most feared man next to Stalin.

"Having tea with Beria" was the military euphemism for being personally beaten and tortured by him, he was well known for taking sadistic delight in personally torturing some individuals, even to killing their wives and children. In this aspect he was different from Himmler who witnessed executions, but apart from kicking one man always stayed behind his desk. For Beria there seemed to be some form of personal gratification in making his victims suffer. He was, despite occasional claims it was mainly myth, a brutal sexual predator. All these traits may produce various explanatory terms such as amoral and psychopathic tendencies, but they are not necessarily the result of a country in turmoil. Internal strife and war or an atmosphere of general brutality do not automatically make an individual suddenly immoral.

Maximilian Kolbe a German Friar in 1941 offered himself to be executed in a German concentration camp to spare the life of a married man. It was not the Nazi background that made him the type of man he was, his human goodness shone through the depravity. The circumstances provided the chance to expose the man's goodness, and there are thousands of other illustrations, but they are less commemorated under the overwhelming circumstances of the day. Self-sacrifice of this nature is not inbred, not pre-wired, not inherited, and not dictated by external pressures. It arises from a deliberate choice of free will and a compassionate desire to save another; it is the best of humanity.

In a brutal racial war, the historian Burleigh outlined accounts of German soldiers who risked their lives to save Jewish people. A Reinhold Lofy (with a Catholic background) refused to shoot an elderly Jew when ordered, and when he was promoted to Lieutenant, he refused to send his men out on a suicide mission which, along with his comments on Nazi policy, left him sentenced to six years in a penal battalion. A Corporal Anton Schmidt was a middle-aged soldier, he was no intellectual, never read a book, ran a truck repair garage when at home as a civilian, but he forged false papers "to spirit three hundred Jews out of Vilna, depositing them in the smaller towns of Lithuania where they seemed safer;" he was executed.⁵⁶⁹ In 1939 a German staff officer called Major Helmuth Stieff wrote to his wife that he felt guilty on seeing the ruins of Warsaw, and that "it shamed me to be a German."⁵⁷⁰ A General Blaskowitz wrote and complained about the atrocities. Not every German co-operated or agreed with the barbaric orders, and many understood that it was morally reprehensible. There were the business men like Oskar Schindler, Freidrich Graebe, Franz Fritzsche who like the military examples mentioned above decided not to cooperate with immoral deeds, and they did not allow themselves to be moulded by the surrounding historical circumstances of the day. There are many such examples, many lost in the confusion of war, but one's environmental or historical background does not necessarily dictate a person's behaviour or attitudes, and free will could still be activated.

Beria, however, used his circumstances in this historical backdrop to enhance his own ambitions. He chose the way to power out of the desire to gain authority and recognition. He utilised the historical situation to his own ends. He was clever enough to understand that in the brutality and dehumanising atmosphere of his times, he had to choose between being someone eking out a living in the background, keeping a low profile, or utilising the inverted norms to make himself successful. He never hesitated to do what he considered as necessary to reach out to Stalin and seek

personal ultimate power. To claim he was a “man of his times” is far too simple as it would be to say Friar Kolbe was a man of his times. Kolbe’s self-sacrifice was extraordinary, but Beria’s decision to murder his way to power had counterparts in others, but never as dedicated as Beria’s. Beria was no automotive robot, he was a human being who in his early years had dedicated himself to ascend the ladder of power by any means. In his early years he would have sat back and decided his possible course of action under the circumstances of the day and made his own decision; as a clever and intelligent man he was responsible, and he simply utilised the current situation to his own end.

Every person responds to the historical events in their life, but as Kolbe demonstrated *goodness* Beria personified *evil*, and, as is common in most human experience, this is their freedom of choice. The problem as John Steinbeck wrote at the peak of World War Two as he contemplated good, evil, and the contradiction of human nature is that “it isn’t that the evil thing wins—it never will—but that it never dies.” Humanity has freedom of choice.

CHAPTER FOUR

FREEDOM OF CHOICE SUPPRESSED

The question of an individual's personal involvement, in what history now deems to be criminalised immoral acts, remains a complex problem. For some such deeds appear to be explained by certain arguments which will be explored here. Burleigh asked the question bluntly when he wrote: "The notion of moral crimes is superficially tautological. It becomes clearer if one recalls postwar prosecutors asking these men whether, if ordered, they would also have shot the own children, to which the response was indignantly negative. Since that suggests they retained a sense of crime and wrongdoing, how did they reconcile this with their own heinous actions?"⁵⁷¹

As mentioned in Part Three under the sub-chapter on International Law, the general feeling of most thinking people is that individuals are responsible for their own actions, because the choices they made amounted to an identifiable criminal act. The law, be it national or international, reflects or codifies the norms of the day for typical people. The clue for the ordinary person is also frequently based on the undeniable phenomenon of personal conscience.

Most people have some form of conscience which differs from person to person. It is conceivable that having examined the life of Beria that his personal conscience was extremely limited because of his passion for power. He obviously loved his family, but when it came to the deaths and imprisonments of totally innocent people it is apparent that his sense of a moral consciousness was at the barest minimum. He was unquestionably like Stalin devoid of human compassion, but most people worry about their own conduct, and the "prickling" conscience remains a sure sign that there is an awareness that they had freedom of choice when they have made the wrong decision. This is common to every thinking person and deathbed confessions confirm that conscience persists to the bitter end.

In Browning's account of the massacres in Poland he pointed out that Trappe, a commander of such an horrific event, was visibly upset at his orders and said: "if this Jewish business is ever avenged on earth, then have mercy on us Germans."⁵⁷² In the postwar examination of this event Browning found "the war diary falls strangely silent about what happened

in Białystok following Motua's ordering of execution;" this is a common feature for individuals and even communities which tend to suffer from deliberate or unintentional amnesia of ghastly events.⁵⁷³ Even at the time of these events there was a recognition that what was happening was morally wrong, and in a contemporary letter written by the Head of the German civil administration regarding the Jewish action, it stated that "what else concerns this action, I must to my greatest regret emphasise, is last of all that it bordered on sadism."⁵⁷⁴ Even the top police commanders were not immune to breakdown, one commander called Bach-Zelewski had an intestinal operation which did not heal and during "which he was plagued by nightmarish visions of the killings of Jews in the east."⁵⁷⁵

The fact remains that even soldiers accustomed to killing are often shocked when moral norms are totally inverted. There is a moral line in most normal human beings characterised by the phenomenon of conscience, and conscience is a sure sign that as humans we recognise the difference between right and wrong. More to the point people know this is their personal choice based on free will, their freedom of choice. However, there are some pertinent arguments that claim that man's free will can sometimes be seriously suppressed, and their actions are beyond their personal area of control.

Because of War

When Goldhagen posed the question that "it must be shown how people can be brought to commit acts to which they would not inwardly assent, acts which they would not agree are necessary or just," the reasons are sadly many.⁵⁷⁶ The brutalising effects of battlefield combat are in a special context because this "often leads to an automation-like state in which much of the conscious mind closed itself down and instinct took over" but even so "only about two per cent of combat soldiers are reckoned to have positively revelled in lethal violence."⁵⁷⁷ The sheer immediacy of a battlefield leaves no time for thoughtful consideration which free will tends to demand; it becomes a matter of survival and immediate reactive response. There are plenty of autobiographies and accounts where it is apparent that when the battle has finished many men return to normal living, but others are tortured by their consciences, especially when they have killed a man unnecessarily; for example, shooting someone who had been trying to surrender. The battlefield regarded by some as heroic is a form of human degradation where the human instinct for survival at any costs, can lead to sheer aggression and a bitterness for revenge. In base terms humanity and its normal moral values are obliterated in the heat of battle.

As such the legal teams at Nuremberg were correct in making the perpetration of a war into a criminal act because it dehumanises the individuals involved, by changing them from being free agents into automatons.

Moreover, the heat of the battlefield often spills over into the surrounding areas of the battle confrontation. Solzhenitsyn makes the interesting observation that in his time during Stalin's repression the battlefield atmosphere was almost part of daily life, stating that "once you have been steeped in blood, you can only become crueller. And, anyway, cruelty was praised and instilled, and you would soon lose track, probably, of just where between bad and good that trait lay."⁵⁷⁸ He wrote that: "Like raging beasts, abandoning every concept of 'humanity,' abandoning all humane principles which had evolved through the millennia, the authorities began to round up the very best farmers and their families, and to drive them, stripped of their possessions, naked, into the northern wastes, into the tundra and taiga [areas in the northern latitudes]."⁵⁷⁹ The ordinary Russian was plunged into the battlefield experience in and out of war which led to a mindless sense of sheer brutality and loss of will-power.

As an immediate example, in 1941 the Germans had cut off the area around Taganrog where the Soviets were holding some of their own national inmates in freight trains and were uncertain as to what to do with their own civilian prisoners. It was decided not to leave them for the Germans "and oil tank trucks were rushed to the station, and the wagons were drenched with oil and set on fire. All prisoners were burned alive."⁵⁸⁰ As Solzhenitsyn observed "a man is a product of his whole experience—that is how we come to be what we are," and interestingly he blamed this explosion of atavism on "the cult of personality."⁵⁸¹ However, it is on the battlefield that people are deprived of any sense of freedom of action, but in Russia at times this deprivation of freedom of action and its subsequent brutality was all too pervasive, even beyond the pitch of battle.

The Germans perpetrated blatant massacres of Jews, Russians, Slavs and any form of opposition, and Stalin's orders were analogous. Russia had not signed the Geneva Convention although in principle Germany, which had, was obliged to observe them unilaterally, and the humble German *Landser* (ordinary German soldier) was instructed to wipe out Red sub-humanity with "brutalising effects."⁵⁸² Even before Barbarossa, Stalin through Beria's organisational skills and advice, took his guidance and initiated the notorious Katyn massacres and desperately tried to conceal this type of behaviour. Later, at the Nuremberg Trial "the Soviets had despatched Niklai Zoria, a senior military lawyer, to ensure that this subject was never aired in court, and he was found shot dead in his Nuremberg hotel room shortly after

it became evident that he had failed.”⁵⁸³ Later eight Germans were executed in Leningrad for their alleged role in the Katyn massacre.⁵⁸⁴ Nuremberg would cover many types of defined criminal acts but “largely because of what was revealed at Nuremberg, the trials are now most remembered for their association with war crimes” by individuals.⁵⁸⁵

The role of the individual’s choice of action even in armed conflict could not be ignored in the public mind, but it was believed or hoped that senior commanders would be better placed to control the excesses of war fermented in the heat of battle. There were many recorded incidents on all sides where it was apparent that even senior men lost control of any sense of responsible morality. In the American army, where men were not fighting on their home soil, a Sergeant West (a cook in civilian life) shot thirty-seven Italian prisoners and later another thirty-six as alleged snipers. A chaplain and two reporters complained to General Omar Bradley, who went to see Patton who had apparently turned a blind eye to this outrage because he had issued the order “to kill devastatingly.” West was sentenced to life imprisonment but only served a year then reduced to the ranks and returned to duty.⁵⁸⁶ Canadian troops on D-Day took few prisoners, killing most, but “common sense suggests that one should distinguish between hot-blooded and cold-blooded atrocities,” but senior officers were expected to be more detached and exercise better control.⁵⁸⁷

The bitter nature of armed conflict, as Solzhenitsyn noted, spilled over into everyday life on both sides of the divide. Even in the safety of the British Parliament there was a battle-induced desire for hostile revenge. A furious conservative MP suggested that for every innocent person killed by the Germans a Nazi town or village should be wiped out, to which Churchill acidly replied, “there would not be enough German villages to go around.”⁵⁸⁸ Another suggestion was to kill German POWs, but this was a violation of international law and ignored. If British parliamentarians and senior commanders could react in this way during war it is of little surprise that those caught up in the conflict lost any sense of freedom of choice and reacted with brutal actions with no sense of human compassion. On the battlefield and its associated environments free will was repressed because of survival instincts, and the bitterness of conflict spilt over with the human desire for revenge. As Solzhenitsyn noted this sense of barbaric reaction was almost part of Soviet life whipped up by men like Stalin and his cohort Beria.

The issue of immoral behaviour evolving from war has ramifications for the individual caught up in the conflict, their leaders, and a nation. Strategic bombing (carpet-bombing as opposed to tactical bombing directed at specific military sites) caused both personal and national dilemmas. The

Italian air-theorist Giulio Douhet had postulated that bombing would shorten wars of attrition, but until recent years the best-known bomb-sighting devices were known to be totally inaccurate. For the individual aircrew member, it was a time of considerable distress both in terms of personal safety, and for many the knowledge that their task would annihilate innocent people including women and children. In the RAF there were many “psychological casualties” signed off as suffering from LMF (lack of moral fibre). Some were not suffering from lack of moral fibre, but a conscience about being ordered to slaughter thousands of people.

When at Nuremberg it was proposed to prosecute the Germans for bombing it was “on the advice of the British Foreign Office this particular charge was quietly withdrawn since it was self-evident that German defence lawyers would have little difficulty in tarring Allied bombing with the same brush.”⁵⁸⁹ All sides were at fault in this moral dilemma of killing the innocent as an act of war. It was not until 1949 that a Geneva Convention placed conditions regarding killing civilians, especially women and children, and this was augmented in 1977. The moral situation remains, as the innocent still suffer from the computerised GPS (global positioning system) devices used today, and nuclear weapons let alone bio-chemical weapons cannot be selective. The attempted killing of Sergei Skripal by a nerve agent in Salisbury failed but killed another. A major onslaught with bio-chemical weapons would have no selective GPS guidance, and as in major carpet bombing there is no discrimination; it all simply amounts to the mass annihilation of life.

War has an escalating effect, each warring side responding to what they consider the other side’s violations. The liberal democracies had always tried to hold the moral high ground, and with Guernica (therefore, it was argued the Germans could do this again) in mind had always condemned the bombing of civilians. This exploration is not an attempt to pass a moral judgment, but to understand how war narrows the moral perspective. A reason had to be found for carrying out a policy of mass destruction.

It was therefore propagated that the Germans had *sowed the wind* and would *reap the whirlwind*. In most wars it becomes a matter of the old Biblical *Lex talionis* (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) and it was no surprise that the RAF reflected this in their operational names of *Gomorrah*, *Millennium*, and *Chastise*.⁵⁹⁰ Other reasons given were the instinct for survival against political subjugation and the loss of nationhood. These all brought the elements of total war to the forefront, and for many this limited the moral perspective and sense of free will. To make sure the public knew why the English democratic liberal society was committed to a policy of annihilation, the argument was based on the perceptions of Nazi

Germany, that they were a menace to civilisation, and they had started the war. These facts and the utter indiscriminate destruction of aerial bombing prompted a sense of “moral relativism.”⁵⁹¹

The director of the International Peace campaign, a Philip Noel-Baker approved of bombing claiming it was “almost civilised ‘compared to the concentration camps and to the Himmler terror.’”⁵⁹² The Church of England tended to condone the policy, and when a petition was raised against such bombing the Dean of St Pauls refused to sign. There was a campaign against Night-bombing (because it was perceived as too inaccurate) signed by Bishop Bell of Chichester, George Bernard Shaw, Gilbert Murray, Vera Brittain and many others, both pacifist and otherwise. It was clear that despite the political propaganda, and the major support for indiscriminate bombing, some people retained their right of choice expressed through this petition; at least a petition was possible in a liberal type democracy.

Postwar, and even during the war, it was known that the bombing was not very effective in destroying military and industrial targets, but that families who had nothing to do with the war effort, were being annihilated. Trenchard once stated that the material effects of the bombing were of less importance than the moral and psychological ramifications on the German public. When Churchill allowed the bombing of Dresden it was probably not an attack on a city for military purposes (though it was a crossroads for troop movement) but to prepare a way for the Soviets, and to impress them with Allied air power. One thing was certain, it was one of the “paradoxes of total war that both the bomber crew and the bombed could be traumatised by their experience.”⁵⁹³

When war is unleashed and becomes total war then the sense of normal morality is often inverted at a national and personal level; a few managed to retain their sense of accepted norms of morality and retained their free will, which in a liberal society they could still exercise. The majority, perhaps understandably, in the very nature of such a destructive war followed their leaders with determination, and who could argue that this was wrong without being moralistic. It is easy to gain the belief that in times of total war a sense of morality must be placed on the shelf; this is self-evidently wrong, but the very nature of war limits humanity’s perception of morality, and the exercise of free will and the freedom of choice. The nature of war, any war, is simply immoral by destroying the individual, and dehumanising people by limiting their freedom of choice. Many conscientious objectors found themselves in prison and despised; many others found themselves committed to actions they felt were immoral.

Putative Duress

One of the arguments which frequently surfaces for the suppression of free will is described as putative duress or coercion. The contention being that “if I do not cooperate then I shall be shot, and my family will suffer” leaves no room for personal choice. Stalin deployed this threat extensively, warning his soldiers orders must be obeyed, and if they disobeyed (by not fighting to the death and becoming prisoners) they would be regarded as traitors, and their families sent to the camps. It was his effort to stop any retreat and to fight ferociously and it often worked, but he used this policy for many other situations. The same policy applied for refusing any order which involved killing the enemy however helpless that enemy had become. The thousands killed in the Katyn massacres were all too typical where the executioners either felt they had no choice, or they believed their leader’s ideology was so important their own thinking processes were irrelevant.

In his study of the German Police Battalion the historian Christopher Browning made it clear that even a German soldier could refuse to take part in a massacre. As already noted the commander of this group of men was called Trappe who made an extraordinary offer: if any of the older men among them did not feel up to the task that lay before him, “he could step out.”⁵⁹⁴ However, at the massacre in Józefów “a mere dozen men out of nearly 500 had responded instinctively to Major Trapp’s offer to step forward and excuse themselves from mass murder.”⁵⁹⁵ Putative duress will always be a threat under some circumstances especially since the ordinary man will wonder whether a higher authority than the immediate officer in charge may take a different viewpoint on putative duress and the consequences.*

In the Soviet Union during Stalin’s time putative duress had to be taken seriously and the camps were full of people who had ignored the danger. This is not to say that free will was not potentially operational, and many paid the price with their loss of freedom of action. The nature of this threat unquestionably and understandably suppressed the freedom of a person’s own will power, and it raises the disconcerting question of how we would react from the comfort of a warm study. To exercise free will and resist such an order with a threat against oneself and family would take considerable strength of personality. The same stress applied widely in both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. When men found the ordeal of killing repugnant and opted out of the German massacres, there was less chance of

* Burleigh in his extensive study noted there was “not a single recorded instance of any German mass murderer being sanctioned in any formal sense for refusing to participate.” See Burleigh Michael, *Moral Combat* (London: Harper Press, 2010) p.401

such a choice in the Soviet Union with NKVD troops all too ready to arrest such a person as a traitor.⁵⁹⁶

One thing which was clear from Browning's postwar interviews with the culprits were the variety of delayed reactions to their past deeds. Some appeared to suffer from a form of amnesia, unclear about details and obscure about their feelings. Others blotted memories out and returned to normal life as if nothing had happened, and many more suffered nightmares at the time, and long after as their consciences started to probe them. The number who felt guilty about such criminal acts clearly indicated that although they felt they had no choice under the threat of putative duress, many still knew their actions had been morally wrong. They were not trained killers but just ordinary policeman from Hamburg of which 63% were working class, 35% lower middle class, sales and office jobs, and 2% middle class professionals such as teachers and chemists, and they all knew their free will was an option they dared not activate, many to their later distress.⁵⁹⁷ In Russia men like Stalin and Beria made putative duress a deadly and widespread threat.

Obeying Orders

Obeying orders was a subject frequently raised at Nuremberg where the arguments ranged around the fact that it was universally common for men to obey orders, claiming it had been the law of "their" country and that Nuremberg was behaving in a legally retrospective fashion. The infamous Robert Ley stating "that I had nothing to do with them [the Jewish people] at all. I was not in charge."⁵⁹⁸ It was noted by some experts that Ley was the victim of the degeneration of the frontal lobes of the brain and exacerbated by an air-crash in 1917.⁵⁹⁹ Despite this remote possibility he was still charged on the grounds of his personal responsibility arising from his own decisions, but he avoided the consequences by committing suicide.

Obeying orders was a common defence and it appeared a pertinent question to ask how ordinary soldiers or servants could question orders from above. This has often crossed the mind of many even in everyday life. When the top authority orders something to be done, which to the manager seems wrong, it is often said: *It's not my fault, I am just following orders*, and this is commonplace in civilian life to this day.

The main thrust of the argument for obeying an order is external compulsion, namely coercion, and thereby it is argued many perpetrators had no choice. Goldhagen claimed that German soldiers had a propensity to follow orders, probably based on their military tradition of blindly following orders without question. He also believed they were subject to social psychological pressure by comrades, and they were merely petty bureaucrats

who did the ordering with their careers in mind. In summary it was a matter of coercion, obedience, and situational pressure. As noted, he added that Germans found it psychologically impossible to say no and added the further explanations of self-interest and bureaucratic myopia.⁶⁰⁰ He could also have added this was not just a German problem.

Obeying orders under coercion was a more serious issue for those living in Stalin's Soviet regime. Even senior ranked and popular generals such as Zhukov were terrified of Stalin and Beria. They knew from bitter experience to disobey a command could lead to a show trial, a trial in camera, car accident, or a medical mishap, but there was certainty of death if they crossed swords with Stalin or Beria. Those lower down the rungs of power and ordinary citizens had little doubt of the consequences of not obeying. Nazi Germany was bad enough but the threat in the Soviet Union was even greater. Beria's NKVD troops during the attack on Finland stood at the rear of the Red Army and shot anyone deemed to be retreating, and they would kill or arrest anyone at Beria's command. Any failure to obey an order in Stalin's time was instant death.

As Solzhenitsyn wrote: "This is surely the main problem of the twentieth century: is it permissible merely to carry out orders and commit one's conscience to someone else's keeping? Can a man do without ideas of his own about good and evil."⁶⁰¹ There are many examples in history and during the twentieth century when some brave people refused to obey an immoral command and paid with their lives. It is not for any historian sitting in his or her study, to pass judgment on such reactions one way or the other, without being personally confronted by the same situation. It is, however, necessary to indicate that some people had the strength of character and personal drive to disobey an immoral command fully aware of the consequences. A person must be strong to exercise his or her free will in this type of situation, but there is no question that if a person's life is under threat of death their free will or choice of action is severely repressed. Stalin and Beria ensured that this repression of people's free will was utilised to a mammoth extent across the vast land-space dominated by their form of Communism.

Cowardice in Breaking Ranks

Ervin Staub claimed that cruelty is a common trait, that psychological processes are normal and "evil that arises out of ordinary thinking and is committed by ordinary people is the norm, not the exception."⁶⁰² This sweeping statement for most thinking people is simply untrue, but few people like to be called cowards or traitors and will sometimes commit

immoral acts to avoid this accusation. The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote that “cruelty is social in its origin much more than it is characterological,” and further suggested “that most people ‘slip’ into the roles society provides for them, and he is very critical of any implication that ‘faulty personalities’ are the cause of human cruelty.”⁶⁰³ In upholding this line of thinking many people refer to Zimbardo’s prison experiments mentioned earlier, where less than twenty per cent emerged as “good guards,” and Milgram’s electric-shock experiment demonstrated the human tendency to obey orders.

The question which arises at this juncture is the human propensity to fit in with the rest of the herd whatever their comrades are doing. Some people seem to need the esteem of their colleagues and neighbours, to be one of the team and not breaking ranks for fear of being called a coward.

This was tested time and time again as men struggled between their individual conscience and the general social norms of their surroundings. Browning wrote “coping with the contradictions imposed by the conscience on the one hand and the norms of the battalion on the other led to many tortured attempts at compromise: not shooting infants on the spot but taking them to the assembly point.”⁶⁰⁴ No one wants to be thought a coward, and for many their standing with comrades was more important than any feelings for the victims they had been ordered to kill. This was why Nazi propaganda made the Jew out to be sub-human, and Stalin created the enduring enemy in the dangerous counter-revolutionaries.

It is often accepted that “within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressure on behaviour and sets moral norms.”⁶⁰⁵ This feature can be found from the school playground to the office. In killing innocent people, including children and babies, some may have felt under pressure not to make their own judgments but simply commit themselves to follow their group. This need to correspond with the norm clashed with other norms when other soldiers watching massacres “scorned” what was happening “jeering that they should be fighting at the front rather than massacring old men and women.”⁶⁰⁶

These efforts of harmonising with the norm of the group are somewhat superficial as history and everyday experience provides many examples of quite the opposite, where people have stepped aside exercising their own moral judgment, and many who did not have suffered serious attacks on their conscience in subsequent years. “Daniel Goldhagen was surely right to reject the overly bloodless, sociological manner in which a generation of academics wrote about these crimes, attributing them to ‘modernity’ or structural dynamics that minimised individual agency or ‘malice.’”⁶⁰⁷ There is no question that weak men need a group, but even weak men let alone

stronger men can reason that they would rather be seen by a few as cowards and breaking ranks than condemned by their own conscience as merciless killers. As Solzhenitsyn once wrote “I was startled not for the first time or the last to realise what far from ordinary souls are concealed within deceptively ordinary exteriors,” and the ordinary man could still utilise his freedom of choice despite some perceived social stigma.⁶⁰⁸

CHAPTER FIVE

POWER OF IDEOLOGY

“There was certainly no dearth of patriotism when men joined up,” and this was especially true in the Great War, but although it existed in the Second World War many were driven by the prevailing ideology of their own landscape.⁶⁰⁹ Most individuals have a personal ideology be it religious, political or social and this often explains their conduct. Nations have an ideology, the west often boasting of “freedom” but during the period in question the “liberal democracy” was challenged by the ideological forms of Fascism and Communism, both of which led to totalitarian states. The twentieth century could almost be described as the era of ideologies. An ideology can be good or bad but it often the “Ideology—which gives evildoing its long-sought justification” and it “worked for the Inquisition and still prevails.”⁶¹⁰ It is the warped ideology which leads to war, repression and ensuing brutality; “for people to be willing to slaughter others, in this view they must be in the grip of a powerful ideology, that is so self-evidently false that only the disturbed few could actually succumb to it (aside from those who cynically exploit it for power).”⁶¹¹ When in the grip of an ideology it is possible for a person’s freedom of choice to be seriously curtailed. It is possible for a person to reflect that *such and such an action* does not seem right, but because their national ideology demands a certain course of action; freedom of choice becomes limited if that ideology is regarded as of paramount importance. As Solzhenitsyn noted it is “thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions...without evil does there would have been no Archipelago.”⁶¹² Ideology did have a marked effect on many of its adherents, in the last page of his memoirs Sudoplatov wrote: “The Soviet Union—to which I devoted every fibre of my being and for which I was willing to die; for which I averted my eyes from every brutality, finding justifications in its transformation from a backward nation into a superpower; for which I spent long months away,” but finally adding the bitter thought that it was not until the collapse of the Soviet Union that he was rehabilitated.⁶¹³ It was only in 1993 that Sudoplatov concluded his book

with the words that he too had been a victim of political ideological repression.

An immoral ideology reflects the leaders who created the ideology, and it is generally accepted that "Nazism was cruel because Nazis were cruel; and the Nazis were cruel because cruel people tended to become Nazis."⁶¹⁴ In Russia Stalin was a power-megalomaniac supported by similar minded men such as Beria who were no better than the Nazis. It is the ideology which often produces the perpetrators of immoral and wicked deeds, the founders of cruelty and shapers of the warped ideology. In his works Goldhagen appears to place less store on ideology and placed more emphasis on political culture, but it is a small step to see anti-Semitism as part of an ideology. It was the Nazi inculcation of this doctrine, a form of brain-washing, which appeared to give justification to the Holocaust. Solzhenitsyn wrote "fortunately, it is in the nature of the human being to seek justifications for his actions," and it was often the ideology which provided a sense of justification.⁶¹⁵ The perpetrators of these Nazi crimes had been "immersed in a deluge of racist and anti-Semitic propaganda."⁶¹⁶ Sudoplatov who organised the death of Trotsky wrote that "we did not believe there was any moral question involved in killing Trotsky or any other of our former comrades who had turned against us."⁶¹⁷ Sudoplatov was driven by his political belief imbued by Stalin's version of Communism. It is the ideology of extreme Islamic terrorists that preoccupies many today with the difficulty of eradicating or challenging aggressive ideologies. There can be little doubt that an ideology can control a person's thinking to such an extent their personal freedom of choice is subjugated to their political or religious beliefs.

It appears that ideology has been given less attention in accounting for such wicked deeds and instead the emphasis has focused on social psychological influences, claiming for example that "the Holocaust perpetrators were shaped by and operated in a particular social and historical setting."⁶¹⁸ Generations of anti-Semitism gave rise to the Holocaust, but it was Nazi ideology which produced the final hell-like definition. According to Nazi ideology the Jews were portrayed as a biologically programmed people of great power, dedicated to destroying Germany, who by constitution and deed forfeited the protection of traditional morality." A children's book in 1936 contained the following:

*The Devil is the father of the Jew.
When God created the world,
He invented the races:
The Indians, the Negroes, the Chinese,
And the wicked creature called the Jew.*

“This morality was based on a pseudo-scientific belief in the absolute inequality of the human races,” and was a fundamental tenet of Nazi ideology.⁶¹⁹ This was a powerful motivating force in giving a sense of reason to the perpetrators of some of the most wicked deeds recorded in human history.

It was no different in the Soviet Union, which although like its predecessors the Tsars, many Soviet leaders were at times anti-Semitic, but their ideology revolved mainly around “The Party” and the so-called idealism of world Communism. Basically, it was Stalin’s interpretation which counted, and he and his cohorts like Beria ensured that through their disseminated ideology Stalin and his cohorts remained in power; they demanded no opposition and total obedience. Their ideology meant that no person could exercise any judgment beyond the demands of *The Party*. The people were no longer individuals able to exercise the right of freedom of choice, but they were driven by the external forces dictated by the given ideology.

Although his academic insights concerned anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Goldhagen pertinently wrote: “I maintain that any explanation that fails to acknowledge the actors’ capacity to know and to judge, namely to understand and to have views about the significance and the morality of their actions, that fails to hold the actors’ beliefs and values as central, that fails to emphasise the autonomous motivating force of Nazi ideology, particularly its central component of anti-Semitism cannot possibly succeed in telling us much about why the perpetrators acted as they did.”⁶²⁰ He added that “simply put, the perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality having judged the mass annihilation of Jews to be right, did not *want* to say no.”⁶²¹

The constraints in the Soviet Union were the same in Germany though they arose in another shape and size. Those closest to Stalin such as Beria felt their ideology was right and chose to adhere to its so-called principles, they chose to do so from their freedom of action; they made the choice. It was very different for many ordinary citizens whose choices were already seriously circumscribed.

On Stalin’s death Beria led the charge for reform which for some indicated that they knew the past policies of their ideology had been wrong, but this is unlikely because men like Beria were using the moment to seize power and offered reform to be selected for ultimate leadership. Beria was executed, and Khrushchev made minor reforms, but a similar repression continued, and the dangers of a third world war increased because of their ideology.

Ideology can be dangerous and in the Soviet concept, and to a lesser extent with other totalitarian states, it made freedom of choice for the

individual severely limited. It was Stalin's ideology enforced by men like Beria which ensured that people had little or no free will but were subjugated to the will of the State; only the very strong could object to their loss of freedom of action which all too frequently meant execution or a slow death in the Gulag camps.

CHAPTER SIX

DOWNGRADING HUMANITY

Every now and then new ideas emerge which revolve around the challenging of the concept of free will. Recent scholarly studies almost give the appearance that there is a general attack on humanity's claim to Free Will. Most of the efforts tend to argue that free will can be suppressed or governed by various factors be they internal or external, which as noted above may have strong elements of truth; but human self-consciousness persists as part of our make up as people. The ability to reason is what makes us human, and the freedom of choice for most of mankind is not an illusion. To claim that free will is a myth, that the inner-self's facility to reason is delusional is to downgrade humanity to animal life at the best, or more dangerously to mere reactive automatons.

One of the latest assaults on freedom of choice is a study which relates more to the warning of future dangers with the new age of computers and AI (artificial intelligence); some see this as challenging the freedom of the human mind to make individual and free choices. The way we surf the net and how we react can be monitored to such an extent, that the influence on our way of thinking is sometimes so vast that it gives the appearance that the algorithms know us better than we sometimes know ourselves. This is a point strongly made by the currently famous Yuval Noah Harari in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* in which he suggested that the normal influences of religion and nation are minimalised, and humanity will soon live in a kind of matrix with our free will (if it exists) diminishing. He claimed that "the twin revolutions of infotech and biotech could reconstruct not just economics and societies but our very bodies and minds."⁶²²

Harari makes the point that the new technology is all but hacking into our own beings, into the very part of us which defines us as an individual. We may think we have human intuition, but for algorithms it is a mere matter of pattern recognition. Harari makes the claim that most people do not know themselves as well as the algorithms know us. It invades the innermost part of our beings. We are all aware that the computer can be more intelligent than the individual, faster, and more incisive as demonstrated by chess computers. Computers are used in medical diagnosis, as well as to

produce music and art. However, an interesting viewpoint Harari makes, despite his claim on the limitation of free will, is that the computer with its algorithms and vast databases has no sense of *self* or self-consciousness.

He makes the valid point that the use of algorithms can create new power bases for the future which can influence people; those who control the brain and body may one day hold a new form of power. He suggests we are on the edge of a new age, namely the coming of the algorithm revolution which can control the passive receivers. Religion and politics which have dictated so much in the past are now being side-lined by this new age. His warning is that as human beings there is a need to reinvent ourselves as life changes. Nevertheless, we may be aware of what is happening, not least because of Harari's warnings, and we know that deep in us is rooted that desire to make our own choices. In preparation it becomes necessary for human beings to guard their emotional intelligence and mental balance, because the algorithmic giants may well know us better than we do ourselves. Although fake news is as old as the hills the algorithmic giants are already influencing the way people vote at elections, and they can attempt to guide their decision making.

This is not an unreasonable line of thought because to use Harari's concept that the human mind can be hacked, it therefore becomes necessary for the individual to guard his or her own mind and reasoning to retain any sense of independence. Harari is undoubtedly correct in his perceptions and free will could be regarded as having this external pressure to limit individual freedom of choice. In days gone by the expression the *Bible tells us so* had been changed to the *computer is always right*. In another sense this new age had its forerunner in the twentieth century use of propaganda when Göbbels was the first of many to utilise this tool to influence whole populations. The power of clever and devious propaganda or powerful algorithms may touch upon our brains, but not necessarily our sense of self-consciousness which is the root of free will.

Harari looked to a future where AI will start to dictate our lives. He raised the question of the chess computer called AlphaZero which was only given the rules of the game, and within four hours was able to beat all comers, human and other computers, and warned of a digital dictatorship.⁶²³ Arising from this digital development Harari pointed out that "the liberal story cherishes human liberty as its number one value. It argues that all authority ultimately stems from the free will of humans" and then argues that even in elections the individual votes not by what a person thinks, but what he or she feels.⁶²⁴ As such "the Big Data algorithms, while undermining the very idea of individual freedom" are becoming the technological revolution which will understand even our feelings.⁶²⁵

The driverless car is his chosen example to illustrate that even our ethical judgements can be bettered by AI. He uses his humorous approach to point out that the philosophical ideals of the past are worthless because we simply react from habits of our ancestors who survived the test of natural selection. A car driven by AI can have built into its system an ethical command of various superior types not controlled by animalistic reactions such as road rage; one version designed to save the passenger at all costs, another that the passenger's life may be disregarded if it avoids killing another person.

He continues this style of argument that AI can do better with job applications because it can rule out human prejudice on gender and racial factors. The fact is of course that it takes human beings to make these computers, and the decisions are human, and it is traumatic speculation to imagine a Nazi racial team producing an AI job application. The engineers of the AI systems are planting their viewpoints, unless in the future computers design new computers. He also examines the future scenario where robotic AI soldiers are less likely to commit massacres based on battle-fatigue and anger, but he also foresees the danger of such machines "because too many governments tend to be ethically corrupt, if not downright evil."⁶²⁶ He paints a dismal picture of a more gross Orwellian future where Big Data analysis will reflect the way AI views the world "more than the way humans view it."⁶²⁷

It is with a sense of relief that Harari points out that AI is hardly likely to gain "consciousness" despite this being a main theme in many science fiction films. An algorithm is incapable of feeling joy or hatred, and "if we are not careful, we will end up with downgraded humans misusing upgraded computers to wreak havoc on themselves and the world."⁶²⁸

There is little question that Harari is somewhat cynical about man's free will in the first place. He wrote that "the liberal story cherishes human liberty as its number one value. It argues that all authority ultimately stems from the free will of individual humans, as it expressed in their feelings, desires and choices," but he argues that freedom of choice is more to do with feelings than reasoning powers.⁶²⁹ He believes that moral feelings such as outrage or guilt developed through our neurons to calculate the probabilities of survival and reproduction, over which we have little or no control.⁶³⁰ Scientists, Harari claims "nowadays point out that morality in fact had deep evolutionary roots pre-dating the appearance of humankind by millions of years."⁶³¹ He rightly believed that religious faith is not a necessary condition for moral behaviour, but because morality is about reducing suffering he underlines the importance of the golden rule "don't do to others what you would not like them to do to you," and admits that

there has “been an enormous contribution of religious belief to the peace and harmony of the world.”⁶³²

He makes the further point that the concept of “self” and freedom are “mythological chimeras borrowed from the fairy tales of ancient times.”⁶³³ As for our desires they are not, he claims, our free choice but the product of biochemical processes. He spent time on indicating scientific research on the brain, but noted the impenetrability of the “mind,” and the very last sentence in his book is the appeal that we had better understand our minds before the algorithms make it up for us.

It is curious that the widely read Professor Harari appears so cynical and plausible in downgrading the nature of free will, when through his meditation he exercises his mind in considering the matter and make-up of his body. The ordinary person, with or without meditation can be very aware of what Campbell called the “inner-self,” or what Harari might describe as the mind. As noted in Part Three, the leading scientist Professor Plomin’s research on genes indicates we inherit many of our personal characteristics, but “that we can fight against them.” This indicates that in our minds, or the inner-self, we can fight against our inherent instincts and make our own decisions, even if they run counter to our given nature.

In reflecting on Harari’s apparent attack (which in substance is a warning) on the human capacity for free will, especially its possible diminution in the future, he is correct in setting out the warning that humanity’s free will can be limited by the means he describes. His belief that consciousness cannot be achieved by a computer comes as something of a relief, but also underlines that humans have this commodity, which is where our free will and not our more automatic responses spring from. Any reflective human being can be aware of the external pressures and still resist. What constitutes humanity is that inner-sense that we are individual, we can still make our own decisions, and we have a sense of conscience based on those decisions. AI and robots are no longer a figment of the novelist’s imagination, but they are produced by self-conscious human beings, for better or worse. A person’s intelligence may be slower than a man-made computer, but that critical feature of humanity remains the self-consciousness which is the source of free will in making major moral decisions one way or the other. It is the major factor that separates man from the animal, and a self-conscious human being may be aware that his mind patterns are understood by algorithms, that he may suffer from coercion, national and family environmental influences, genes and even psychological pressures, but the unique feature of self-consciousness, self-awareness clearly indicates a person can resist these pressures, and use free will in decision making; this retains the essence of Humanity. Harari was right

about human consciousness and the impenetrability of objective research into the mind, but it is in that very scientifically unfathomable inner-self that *free will* exists.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A CONCLUSION

Himmler once had reason to discipline an officer called Globocnik for immoral behaviour, but instead of punishing him he was promoted and became the driving force for the Final Solution in Poland. He was not the only well-known promotion by Himmler; there were many such others such as Dirlewanger and von Gottberg; they would normally have been reduced to the ranks, but Himmler spotted their use as potential killers; they were *selected* because of their propensity to follow daemonic orders.⁶³⁴ This was precisely the reason Stalin chose Beria because he saw in this Georgian servant a man willing to kill, and do anything in order to ingratiate his way into Stalin's favour to promote his own ambitions for power. It is symptomatic of pitiless people that they choose equally merciless servants to carry out their malicious orders.

It has occasionally been suggested that careerism explains why people act wickedly, but of all the reasons proffered for suppressing the free will over the years this seems the flimsiest. Lower down the rungs such men as the Hamburg policemen murdering Jewish families at Józefów were not doing it for the sake of a career move. The sense of a moral norm (and the ever-presence of a conscience) may be repressed under putative duress, or not wanting to be different from the rest of the battalion, but as a career move it is utter nonsense. The policemen were chosen at random, not selected, and the chances of a career in the "killing fields" would have little appeal. In terms of career prospects for the ordinary man there would be time for reflection and the free will would not be seriously suppressed.

For Beria the situation was very different, he did not suppress his free will but deliberately chose an immoral course to ensure his personal success, his selected career. He was a careerist from the minute he took himself hundreds of miles from his home as a young teenager to further his education; he was a man always with an eye to his future. As noted in his biography in Part Two he manipulated his way to the top over the dead bodies of friends and colleagues, denounced superiors, murdered thousands, moved populations into hellish wildernesses, and slowly but surely ensured that Stalin was aware of his *good works*. From his days in Baku until his

attempted leadership bid in 1953 he only had his career in mind. Such were his cunning meanderings it was crystal clear he knew exactly what he was doing, and his moral “ought” he deliberately changed to what “was necessary” to succeed.

Beria was a man who calculatedly decided to gratify his appetites. As Solzhenitsyn noted men “were possessed and directed by the two strongest instincts of the lower sphere, other than hunger and sex: greed for *power* and greed for *gain*. Particularly for power. In recent decades it has turned out to be more important than money.”⁶³⁵ Beria was a sexual predator, lived in luxury in the dacha of a man he had helped destroy, but his love of power knew no bounds. “Power is a poison well known for thousands of years... for those, however, who are unaware of any higher sphere, it is a deadly poison. For them there is no antidote.”⁶³⁶

Beria was never compelled by putative duress; he feared Stalin but was able to manipulate him. He was never in a position of battlefield fever, or tested for being a coward, he was the arch-mover in his choices, and knew exactly what he was doing. Beria was a career man from his youth to just prior to his death, and it is abundantly apparent from his biography that he chose this route. He not only gratified his physical appetites, but he allowed ambition to be his life’s calling. His use of the moral verb “ought” became one of obedience to Stalin to enhance his own standing. In all his violent machinations he showed no sign of regret at any time apart from just prior to his death, and that was simply to avoid execution.

Beria was driven by his ambition for power and although few doubt his adherence to Stalin’s concept of Communism, it was only his obsequious method of gaining Stalin’s trust. When Goldhagen mentioned above that a powerful ideology must grip such men, he cynically and rightly added that only a few succumbed to this “aside from those who cynically exploit it for Power.”⁶³⁷ Beria was among those who by devious forethought used the ideology of Stalin to make his way to power. “If Beria was an exception, it was not because he was amoral, sadistic, and cruel. Rather, it was because he was intelligent, astute, and devoted to achieving power.”⁶³⁸ The question must be asked where did such an abhorrent creature come from?

In Part Three the question of the psychopath was raised and must be addressed. In reviewing the criteria proposed by Professor Hare it appears that Beria fits many of the categories. He was infamous amongst his so-called colleagues and others for his glib remarks and “his superficial charm;” even his enemies recognised this characteristic. Beria certainly had an inflated sense of his “self-worth” with streets named after him, public statues, posters and people standing in an assembly when he appeared. He was a pathological liar when it suited his purpose, known for his manipulative

behaviour and cunning, and the only time he showed remorse was before his death sentence, and that was an anticipated and hopeful means of escape. One of Professor Hare's suggested traits was "emotional shallowness" which with his treatment of women and taking a personal interest in torturing victims is self-evident, and this leads onto the other designated factors of his callousness and lack of empathy. In terms of being unwilling to accept responsibility for his actions he always had a prepared alibi or available false witnesses. Like many others at the top of a corrupt system he lived a parasitic lifestyle. Another feature of the psychopath is promiscuous behaviour, and in this activity, he was even more notorious than Göbbels. It is impossible to ascertain whether he suffered from boredom, it was unlikely he was a juvenile delinquent, or had abnormal behavioural problems as a youth. In terms of impulsivity he was too clever and calculating to jump at an action without thinking. He had long-term realistic goals which he nearly achieved, he stayed with Nina to the end and did not have multiple marriages, his behaviour was bizarre but under control, and he was versatile in his criminal activities, but he would not have recognised it as criminal.

On working through this list of psychopathic traits it is reasonable to suggest that although he may not have been a psychopath, he had psychopathic traits. Above all he was highly intelligent, even the atomic physicists admired his organisational abilities, and he headed so many committees and controlled so many people he was not some out-of-control freak. He plotted, planned, manipulated, organised and based all his skills on his love of power. He knew exactly what he was doing and why, and he allowed no one to stand in his way; only Stalin made him uneasy which is why he hovered around the death bed making sure he was dead. It would be an impossible task to try and guess at the number of people he tortured, women he raped and people he killed by his own hands. It would be equally impossible to estimate the number of people he ordered to have killed, and the numbers, including populations he had sent to the wilderness areas or to the Gulag camps; it was undoubtedly in the millions. He knew precisely what he was doing and why. He had no sense of normal morality because from the earliest of days he had chosen to put himself and his personal future above all other considerations. He was responsible for what he did, making sure that millions of others had no freedom of choice; others were not allowed to follow their free will, but obliged to follow the State or The Party as defined by himself and Stalin. He was Stalin's alter ego, and unlike Stalin he probably knew this to be the case.

As mentioned in Part Three psychopaths must know what they are doing is wrong and immoral. This can be the only reason they often cover their tracks and present a picture of normality. The psychopath who wants his

own way, be it at a personal or national power level, will play by the rule book when possible, and when he or she deviates they will dissemble against any accusations. When, as noted in Beria's biography, Sudoplatov's Jewish wife Emma warned her husband that Beria was a man without feeling, she had undoubtedly spotted that psychopathic trait of lack of empathy. Beria was also unusual in that he expunged any sense of a conscience. It seems to this writer that Beria in his pursuit of power made his own decision to act the way he did, and if he had some psychopathic traits, he was not a genuine medical psychopath which is rare.

He put self-interest above all other beliefs. His actions descended to such a level with such wide-ramifications for millions of people he can only be described as downright evil. His behaviour against fellow humans meant death, prison and suffering, and for millions he deprived them from freedom of choice; he suppressed their free will and debased their humanity in so doing. He obliged men and women to carry out acts, hold certain opinions, and obey at all costs; he deprived them of their humanity.

He was only a henchman of a tyrant, but he became so powerful his frightened comrades led by Khrushchev believed they had no choice but kill him. If there is a hell, he is probably trying to give advice to Satan himself, but the world is better off without him and others like him, because people like him still exist, and they are at their most dangerous in politics or in any position of power over others.

More to the point such grossly immoral behaviour that attracts the term evil comes from within the man. There may be external and internal influences of every conceivable shape which may limit free will, at times suppress it almost to extinction, but because man has freedom of choice, he retains the power of decision. Beria and men like him in power rarely suffer from restrictions of their free will; they impose these restraints on others. Free will is important for humanity because the reflective inner-self and the power of reason is the only real factor which separates us from animals. As the French philosopher Descartes wrote, *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. The power of reasoned thought and freedom of choice makes humanity, humanity. Men like Beria, Himmler, Stalin and Hitler behaved worse than any animal, they created evil because they had freedom of choice, the problem is that this appalling side of humanity still exists today as it has always done. It is a matter of recognising such people and not allowing them to rise to authority over others, or if too late, to retain their power.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Major Figures in Alphabetical Order

(One of the confusing problems for English readers is the spelling of Russian names, as Ordzhonikidze can appear as Orjonikidze and Lavrentii.)

Abakumov Viktor (1908-1954) was later Head of SMERSH, 1943-1946, then Minister of State Security, 1946 -1951; he fell out of Stalin's favour over the Doctors' Plot, survived Stalin but was executed in 1954. "Abakumov remains the most shadowy of Stalin's secret-police bosses... many atrocities were Abakumov's doing, not Beria's, even though most histories blame the latter." Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.477

Bagirov Mircafar (1896-1956) was always close to Beria. He had taken part in the October Revolution and the Civil War. He was the Communist Leader of the Azerbaijan SSR from 1932 to 1953. He tried to survive the downfall of Beria but was tried in 1954 and executed in 1956, though some claim he died in Siberia.

Brezhnev Leonid (1906-1982) was to follow Khrushchëv as General Secretary assisted by Podgorny and Kosygin, and he governed Russia during the 1960s and 1970s. Brezhnev started his progress in the Komsomol groups and at the end of the War (where had mainly been a Political Commissar) he was a Major-General. He met Stalin in 1952 and was appointed to the Central Committee.

Bukharin Nikolai Ivanovich (1888-1938) was a Bolshevik Revolutionary and a prolific writer on Revolutionary theory. He was the editor of Pravda who upheld NEP policy. By 1924 he was Stalin's chief ally but parted company over Stalin's Collectivisation. He was expelled from the Politburo in 1929 and was killed in March 1938 in the purges.

Dekanozov Vladimir (1898-1953) served in Red Army in 1918, joined the Bolshevik Party on 1920. He was a secret agent in Transcaucasia and member of the Cheka in Azerbaijan where he befriended Beria. He joined the NKVD in 1938 as Beria rose to national status, then Deputy Chief of

NKID (Foreign Affairs) in 1939; in 1940 he was the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin. He was executed in 1953.

Kaganovich Lazar (1893-1991) a politician and administrator held many posts and was a close supporter of Stalin. He played a major part in the famine of 1932-33 and was harsh towards any enemies. He was a voting member of the Politburo/Presidium until 1957, led an abortive coup against Khrushchev and expelled in 1961. He died in 1991 as the last surviving Bolshevik.

Kamanev Lev (1883-1936) was a revolutionary and one of the first seven members of the Politburo (the others were Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Stalin, Soloinikov and Bubnov). He was Trotsky's brother-in-law and acting Premier during Lenin's last year (1923-4). He was executed in August 1936 during Stalin's purges.

Kapitsa Petri (1894-1984) was an outstanding physicist with several major studies. He studied in England gaining a PhD at Cambridge and was deep into atomic research but clashed with Beria. In 1955 he became Director of The Institute for Physical Problems (in 1990 the Institute was named after him); he won the Nobel Prize in 1978 and died in Moscow in 1984.

Kedrov Mikhail (1878-1941) was a Soviet politician and secret policeman who was reportedly cruel and barbaric. He slaughtered people and threatened to annihilate whole communities. There was alleged mental illness in the family, and he and his son Igor often complained about Beria to Stalin. Beria had him executed under his personal orders.

Khandzhian (Kanjian)Aghasi (1901-1936) was the First Secretary of Communist Party in Armenia. He was a charismatic leader and popular in that area. He was denounced and although his death was a mystery it now seems Beria was involved. After Stalin's death his reputation was rehabilitated.

Khrushchev Nikita (1894-1971) was to become the well-known Soviet leader during the Cold War, as First Secretary of the Communist Party then Chairman (1952-1964). He supported Stalin's purges and was sent to the Ukraine to continue them. He was at the Battle of Stalingrad and later adviser to Stalin in Moscow. Unusually after his downfall he was only pensioned off and his memoirs were smuggled to the West.

Kirov Sergei (1886-1934) was a prominent Bolshevik leader and was part of the 1905 revolt which led to his arrest. He was a supporter of industrialisation and collectivism, and at the 17th Congress supported Stalin. It is generally believed that Stalin had him killed. He was laid to rest in the Kremlin Wall and Stalin helped carry his coffin.

Krestinski Nikolay (1883-1938) was one of the early revolutionaries but supported Trotsky. He was removed from Politburo in 1921 and was a diplomat until 1927. Unlike most at his Show-Trial he would not admit guilt and was killed in March 1938 in the purges.

Kurchatov Igor (1903-1960) was a Soviet Nuclear Physicist known as “the father of the Soviet Atomic Bomb.” He later advocated the peaceful development of nuclear energy and assisted in the development of the Hydrogen Bomb. In 1949 he was involved in a serious accident caused by entering the hall of a damaged reactor; after which his health declined, and he died in Moscow in 1960 and became part of the Kremlin Wall.

Lakoba Nestor (1893-1936) was the Communist leader in Abkhazia which when incorporated into the Soviet Union remained somewhat independent because of his close relationship with Stalin. Because of his status Beria clashed with him, he was then regarded as an enemy of the people and died in 1936 by Beria’s machinations. In 1953 his reputation was rehabilitated.

Litvinov Maxim (1876-1951) was ethnically a Jewish Russian and married to an English woman. He wanted diplomatic relationships rather than war and assisted in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928; he was famous for the Litvinov Protocol in trying to make sure this Pact was part of Soviet Union thinking. In 1930 he was appointed People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, but he was sacked in 1939 after he failed to convince Britain and France into a treaty against Hitler, and he was then made Ambassador to the USA. His car was hit by a truck in 1951 (possibly arranged by Stalin) and he died from injuries. His wife returned to England in 1972.

Malenkov Georgy (1902-1988) succeeded Stalin as premier of Soviet Union (1953-56). He had been heavily involved in Stalin’s purges; he later ran the Rocket Research and gained favour with Stalin by trying to discredit Zhukov. He took over from Stalin but for a mere nine days and failed in a coup against Khrushchev in 1957. He was exiled to Kazakhstan returning to Moscow where he kept a low profile and converted to the Orthodox faith.

Merkulov Vsevolod (Boris) (1895-1953) started as a detective for the Cheka in Georgia, then from 1925-31 was the Deputy Head of the GPU in Adzharistan. For a few months he was the Peoples’ Commissar of State Security but following the reorganisation from 1941-43 he was Deputy Peoples’ Commissar of the NKVD. He was deeply involved in the Klaus Fuchs atomic spying episode. In 1946 for a brief time he was a minister of MGB but was executed in 1953.

Mikoyan Anastas (1895-1978) was a Soviet Armenian revolutionary who served under Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. He was a strong supporter of Stalin until Stalin turned against him in his final years. Later

he made key-trips to Cuba and the USA. He was the only Soviet politician who managed to stay near the top for a long time and was sometimes known as the Vicar of Bray of politics because he was a survivor. He died in 1978 from old age and was buried in Novodevichy cemetery (the most famous cemetery in Moscow)

Molotov Vyacheslav (1890-1986) was an old Bolshevik who became a leading figure during the 1920s as a protégé of Stalin. He was Chairman of the People's Commissars 1939-41 and Minister of the Foreign Office 1939-1949 and again in 1953-1956. He was First Deputy Premier between 1942-1957 but was dismissed from the Presidium by Khrushchev. He was aware of the Katyń massacre, and probably involved, and opposed Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation.

Orakhelashvili Mamia (1881-1937) was an active Bolshevik politician in Transcaucasia and later part of the *Pravda* board. He died during the Purges in 1937.

Ordzhonikidze Sergo (1886-1937) was Georgian Bolshevik about whom there is a great deal of mystery and lack of verifiable knowledge. He was instrumental in incorporating the Caucasus into the early Soviet Union. He fell out with Stalin and was apparently killed, but it was put down as death by illness.

Pervukhin Mikhail (1904-1978) served under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. He was Chairman of the Council of Ministers (First Vice-Premier of the Soviet Union) from 1955-57. In 1959 he was ambassador to East Germany.

Poskrebyshev Mikhail (1891-1965) was assigned to work for Stalin in the Kremlin. In 1930 he was Chief of the Special Section of the Central Committee. He was forcibly retired in the post-1953 re-arrangements probably because of involvement in the Doctors' Plot.

Redens Stanislav (1892-1940) was born of Polish parents and a secret police official. He joined the Cheka in 1918, and the Crimean GPU in 1922-23 where he became widely known for his brutal repression of the Kulaks. In 1928 he was Chief of the Transcaucasian GPU but was side-lined by Beria. In 1933 he was recalled to Moscow and elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in 1937. Accused of running a Polish underground group he was arrested and shot in 1940. In 1961 under Khrushchev his reputation was rehabilitated.

Rykov Alexei (1881-1938) joined the Bolsheviks in 1903 and took part in the 1905 Revolt. In 1917 he was a member of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. He was regarded as a potential successor to Lenin, and Sovnarkom elected him as Deputy Chairman in 1923. In 1930 he was removed from the

Politburo, and from 1931-37 he was the People's Commissar for Communications. He died in March 1938 as part of the purges. The verdict was annulled in 1988.

Saburov Maksim (1900-1977) was a Soviet engineer, economist and politician. In 1921-26 he was secretary to the Bachmut Komsomol Committee and headed Gosplan (State Planning Committee) three times. In 1947 he became a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and First Deputy Premier in 1955. He was a member of the failed effort to depose of Khrushchev in 1957.

Sudoplatov Pavel was an Intelligence agent and specialist in assassination. He was recognised as a specialist in overseas killing and later managed the death of Trotsky. He became one of the "principal puppeteers of the Kremlin's *danses macabres*." He was a Ukrainian miller's son who had served as a cypher clerk with the Red Army and had spent time for the regime in the Spanish Civil War. After Beria's death he was imprisoned and survived as an embittered man and wrote his memoirs, (Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994). See Hastings Max, *The Secret War* (London: William Collins, 2105) pp.18-21.

Sverdlov Yakov (1885-1919) returned to Petrograd and was elected to the Central Committee; it is sometimes alleged he played a major role in the death of the Romanov family. He died, it is sometimes claimed from typhus, but more probably the flu pandemic in 1919.

Tomski Mikhail (1880-1936) was a factory worker, Trade Union leader and committed Bolshevik. He was a member of the Central Committee as early as 1919 but Stalin forced his resignation in 1929. He oversaw Soviet Chemical Industries and then from 1932 to 1936 led the State Publishing House. To avoid being taken by the NKVD he committed suicide in 1936.

Trotsky Leon (1879-1940) his birthname was Lev Davydovich Bronshtein. He was a Jew from south Ukraine and had fled prison and joined Lenin in London working on a Marxist journal called *Iskra*. Stalin later ordered his death in the infamous ice-axe attack.

Vlasik Nikolai (1896-1967) was a Soviet security official and general. He headed Stalin's personal security from 1931-1952 when he was falsely charged with involvement in the Doctors' Plot. He was sentenced to ten years in the camps but in 1956 it was reduced to five. The sentence was annulled in 2000. His wife always maintained that her husband was convinced that Beria was responsible for Stalin's death.

Voroshilov Kliment (1881-1969) was a prominent Soviet Military Officer and politician during Stalin's time. He was one of the original five Soviet

Union Marshals. In his early days he had been a political commissar alongside Stalin, and never changed from the Party's rulings. After the War he looked after the Communist interests in Hungary, and in 1953 was approved as Chairman of the Presidium. As Khrushchev de-Stalinised Voroshilov faded from the national scene but was brought out of retirement by Brezhnev in 1966. He died a few years later in 1969 and was placed in the Kremlin Wall.

Voznesensky Nikolai (1903-1950) was an economic planner overseeing Gosplan (State Planning Committee) and Deputy Premier in May 1940. He clashed with Stalin over economics but was hated by Beria as a possible contender for Stalin's favour. Later Beria would inform Stalin that Voznesensky was failing to produce enough guns and was given his job. Later Voznesensky found himself caught up in the Leningrad Affair and was tried and executed the same day in 1950. His reputation was rehabilitated in 1954.

Vyshinsky Andrey (1883-1954) was a politician, jurist and diplomat. In 1935 he was the Procurator General of the USSR and headed up Stalin's Moscow trials and was at Nuremberg. From 1948 to 1953 he was Foreign Minister. He died in New York.

Yagoda Genrikh (1891-1938) was a secret police official who served as director of the NKVD 1934-36. He was demoted in favour of Yezhov, was arrested in 1937 and stood in the last of the Terror Trials and executed. His sentence was not later annulled, or his reputation rehabilitated.

Yenukidze (Enukidze) Avel (1877-1937) published Lenin's revolutionary theses during Tsarist times and was accused of diminishing Stalin's literary contributions. In July 1935 he suggested to Stalin that he relinquish power. Stalin expelled him and two years later and he was shot in the purges.

Yezhov Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1940) headed the NKVD from 1936 to 1938 during these purges. Using a play on his Russian name he was nicknamed the Iron Hedgehog. He fell from grace with Stalin and was condemned and executed in 1940.

Zhdanov Andrei (1896-1948) held a variety of posts. He was Second Secretary of the Communist Party ((1939-48), Chairman of the Soviet Union (1946-47) and in 1939 Head of Propaganda and Agitation. In 1946 he was head of the Soviet Union's cultural policy when it was said he reduced "culture to a chart." For a time, he was regarded as Stalin's successor but he was such an alcoholic that even Stalin told him to stop drinking. He died from ill-health.

Zinoviev Grigory (1883-1939) a Bolshevik revolutionary was one of the original members of the first Politburo in 1917 to manage the revolution.

He became the head of Comintern and tried to make Germany communist in the 1920s. Stalin dismissed him in 1926 and he was killed following the first major Show-Trial in August 1936. He is often related to the Zinoviev letter urging British communists to revolt but this was most probably a forgery.

Appendix Two: Katyń

Memo from Beria to Stalin March 5th 1940

Point 13/144 Special File

Top Secret

March 5th, 1940

USSR

Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD)

March 1940

Central Committee, All-Union Communist Party

[TSK VKP (b)]

No. 794/5

Moscow

To Comrade STALIN

NKVD USSR prison-of-war camps and prisons in western parts of Ukraine and Belorussia hold a large number of former Polish Army Officer, former employees of Polish police and intelligence agencies, members of Polish nationalist counterrevolutionary parties, participants in exposed counterrevolutionary insurgent organisations, deserters, i.a. They are all sworn enemies of Soviet authority, filled with hatred for the Soviet system.

The prison of war officers and policemen held in camps are trying to continue c-r work and are conducting anti-Soviet agitation. Each of them is just waiting to be freed so that he can have the chance to actively engage in the struggles against Soviet authority.

NKVD organs in western Ukraine and Belorussia have exposed a number of counterrevolutionary insurgent organisations. In all of these counterrevolutionary organisation and active leadership role was played by former officers of the former Polish Army, former policemen, and gendarmes.

Many persons participating in counterrevolutionary spy and insurgent organisations also have been discovered among the arrested deserters and violators of the national border.

Excluding enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers, the prisoner-of-war camps hold a total of 14,736 former officer, civil servants, landowners, policemen, gendarmes, prison guards, settlers, and intelligence agents; more than 97%are of Polish nationality. Among them are:

Generals, colonels, and lieutenant colonels	296
Majors and captains	2,080
Lieutenants, second lieutenants, and ensigns	6,049

Officers and junior commanders of police, Border guards, and gendarmerie	1,030
Rank and file policemen, gendarmes, prison guards, and intelligence officers	5,138
Civil servants, landowners, priests, and settlers	144

The prisons in the western parts of Ukraine and Belorussia hold a total of 18,632 internees (of which 10,685 are Poles), including:

Former Officers	1,207
Former police intelligence agents and gendarmes	5,141
Spies and saboteurs	347
Former landowners, factory owners, civil servants	465
Members of various counterrevolutionary and Insurgent organisations and various counterrevolutionary elements	5,345
Deserters	6,127

Because they are all inveterate, incorrigible enemies of Soviet authority, the *NKVD* USSR considers it essential to:

I. Order the *NKVD* USSR to give priority consideration (applying the supreme punishment of execution by shooting) to:

- 1) the cases of 14,700 persons held in prisoner-of-war camps, namely former Polish officers, civil servants, landowners, policemen, intelligence agents, gendarmes, settlers, and prison guards.
- 2) as well as the cases of 11,000 persons arrested and held in prison in the western parts of Ukraine and Belorussia, namely members of various counterrevolutionary espionage and sabotage organisations, former landowners, factory owners, former Polish officers, civil servants, and deserters.

II. Conduct the examination of cases without summoning the prisoners and without presenting the accusation, the investigation finding, or the conviction, as follows:

- a) persons held in prisoner-of-war camps according to information presented by the *NKVD* USSR Directorate of Prison of War Affairs,
- b) arrested persons according to information presented by the *NKVD* of the Ukrainian SSR and the *NKVD* of the Belorussian SSR.

III. Assign responsibility for examining these matters and executing the decision to the trio of Comrades MERKULOV, KABULOV [handwritten] and BASH TAKOV (chief of the First Special Division of the *NKVD* USSR).

PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE USSR
[signed] L. Beria.

[handwritten on first page] [scrawled across first page in handwriting]

For

Kalinin—for	I. Stalin
Kaganovich—for	K. Voroshilov
<i>Excerpt.</i>	V. Molotov
Beria	A. Mikoyan
Point 13/144	

March 5, 1940

Appendix Three

This is a typically bland report from Beria showing how Stalin commanded. It exposed that selected peoples whom he did not trust because they may be collaborators or traitors be uprooted and moved.

*Copy
Top secret
Copy No.2*

No. 693/b

STATE DEFENCE COMMITTEE

July 4, 1944

To Comrade J. V. STALIN

The USSR People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs [NKVD SSSR] reports that the resettlement of special settlers from the Crimea–Tatars, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Armenians—has been completed.

In total 225,009 people have been resettled, including:

Tatars	183,155 persons
Bulgarians	12,422 persons
Greeks	15,040 persons
Armenians	9,621 persons
Germans	1,119 persons
Other foreigners	3,652 persons

All the Tatars reached their places of settlement and have been resettled:

In the *oblast's* (regions of Russia) of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) 151,604 persons

In the *oblasts* of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), in accordance with the decision of the State Defence Committee [GOKO] of May 21, 1944–31,551 persons

Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians and Germans, numbering 38,202 persons, are en route to the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic [ASSSR], the Mari ASSR, the Kemerovo, Molotov, Sverdlovsk, and Kirov *oblasts* of the RSFSR and Gur'ev *oblast* of the Kazakh SSR.

The 3,652 persons of other nationalities are destined for resettlement in Fergana *oblast'* of the Uzbek SSR.

All the special settlers who have reached their destination have found satisfactory living conditions.

A significant number of the resettled, able-bodied Tatar special settlers have been engaged in agricultural work in collective and state farms, in logging, in industry and in construction.

There were no incidents during the resettlement operation on site or during transit.

PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Of the Soviet Union

(L. Beria)

s-ta *NKVD*

Chernigov

One copy made for the special Crimea file.

July 3rd, 1944

True copy [signed] V. Popova

[stamp at top of the page:] No. 1-1 p.no.198, SPECIAL FILE

Appendix Four: Background of KGB

Dec 1917: **Cheka and VeCheka** (Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage)

Feb 1922-23: **GPU** based within the **NKVD** (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs).

1923-1934: **OGPU** unified State Political Administration.

July 1934-1941: **GUGB/NKVD** Main Administration of State Security within **NKVD**

Feb 1941- Apr1943: **KGB** People's Commissariat for State Security

July 1941-1943: **GUGB/NKVD**

March 1946: **MGB**

May 1947-Nov 1951:**KI**

March 1953: **MVD**

March 1954-Nov 1991: **KGB**

1991-93: **MB** Ministry of Security

1991: **SVR** Foreign Intelligence Service

1993: **FSK** Federal Counterintelligence Service.

1995: **FSB** Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

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¹²⁸ Hellbeck Jochen in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.202

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¹³⁴ Barbar John in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.292

¹³⁵ Gellately Robert, *Stalin's Curse, Battling for Communism in War and Cold War* (Oxford: OUP, 2013) p.60

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- ¹⁵⁶ Holloway David in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.301
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- ¹⁶² Ibid, pp.12-13
- ¹⁶³ Ibid, p.325
- ¹⁶⁴ Alliluyeva Svetlana, *Only One Year* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) p.240
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- ¹⁸² Hopf Ted in Suny Ronald, *The Structure of Soviet History, Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.369
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- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.137
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- ²¹² Antonov-Ovseyenko Anton, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny* (London: Harper & Row, 1981) p.71
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- ²²⁸ Service Robert, *Stalin* (London: Pan Books, 2010) p.360
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- ²³² *Ibid*, p.13
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- ²³⁸ Conquest Robert, *The Great Terror, A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 1992) p.226
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- ²⁶⁹ Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.605
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- ²⁸⁰ Service Robert, *Stalin* (London: Pan Books, 2010) p.369
- ²⁸¹ Lewin Moshe, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016) p.107
- ²⁸² *Ibid*, p.111
- ²⁸³ Figes Orlando, *The Whisperers* (London: Penguin Books, 2008) p.537
- ²⁸⁴ Lewin Moshe, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016) p.113
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- ²⁹³ *Ibid*, p.35, p.240, p.26, p.241.
- ²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.430
- ²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.39
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- ³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.215
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- ³⁰⁶ See Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.30
- ³⁰⁷ Christopher A and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) p.133
- ³⁰⁸ Khlevniuk V Oleg, *Stalin, New Biography of a Dictator* (London: Yale UP, 2015) p.211
- ³⁰⁹ See Service Robert, *Stalin* (London: Pan Books, 2010) p.573
- ³¹⁰ See Hastings Max, *The Secret War* (London: William Collins, 2105) p.355
- ³¹¹ Sudoplatov Pavel and Anatoli, *Special Tasks, The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994) p.60
- ³¹² See Figes Orlando, *The Whisperers* (London: Penguin Books, 2008) p.402
- ³¹³ See Rubenstein Joshua, *The Last Days of Stalin* (London: Yale University Press, 2016) p.10

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- ³¹⁴ Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.448
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- ³¹⁶ Conquest Robert, *The Great Terror, A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 1992) p.432
- ³¹⁷ See Alliluyeva Svetlana, *Only One Year* (London: Hutchinson, 1969) p.413
- ³¹⁸ See Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin, The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003) p.108
- ³¹⁹ Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.502
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- ³²¹ Kotkin Stephen, *Stalin, Vol II: Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p.626
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